

Delyth Jewell, AS
Chair
The Culture and Welsh Language Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

10 July 2023

Dear Chair

Locating Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Services in North Wales

I am writing to you on behalf of the Cymdeithas yr Iaith Health and Wellbeing Group which campaigns using non-violent methods for the rights of the residents of Wales to receive health and care services in Welsh. As a group, we are very concerned about the Welsh Government's plans for specialist perinatal mental health services for the north of Wales to be located outside of Wales, depriving women and their families of their right to receive care through the medium of Welsh. We call on the Culture and Welsh Language Committee to carry out an investigation into the matter for the reasons outlined below.

There is increasing evidence that patients feel more comfortable, confident and able to discuss their health in their mother tongue (Misell, 2000; Madoc-Jones, 2004; Prys, 2010; Iaith, 2012; CYG, 2014; Hughes, 2018; Martin et al, 2019); and it would be completely unacceptable if these mothers were not able to use their Welsh, given that they are already in such a vulnerable position. Furthermore, if you want to reach someone in a state of mental anguish, it is essential to have effective communication that is appropriate to their language needs (Pavlenko, 2012; Santiago-Rivera and Altarriba, 2002). This can be key for carrying out accurate and reliable assessments, and delivering meaningful and effective treatments (Karliner et al, 2010; de Moissac and Bowen, 2019; Seale et al, 2022). For this reason, there is no doubt that having the opportunity to speak their own language could make such a difference to the experiences and outcomes of the patients in question.

We are aware of wider services provided across the border where expertise has been embedded for many years. However, we believe that this situation is quite different as we already have the mental health expertise in north Wales - often through the medium of Welsh. It must be noted that we are talking about women in their most vulnerable state. We can only imagine the nightmarish situation that they are facing which would be made worse by being in an environment where everything feels unfamiliar, especially the language around them. In such a situation, the treatment must be linguistically appropriate or there is a risk that it will not be effective - or even suitable for the individual.

We are very disappointed with the response of the Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing to the discussion (see the Senedd record of proceedings on 15/2/23 and the minister's written response to Cymdeithas yr Iaith on 1/6/23). By disregarding the importance of the Welsh language in the planning process, the Welsh Government is abandoning the core principles of its strategy *More Than Just Words* and is undermining the human rights of vulnerable women. We call on the Culture and Welsh Language Committee to urgently carry out an investigation into this matter, to considering the evidence in full and re-open the discussion. We are confident that this would lead to new planning in order to protect the language rights of mothers and families in their most vulnerable state.

Yours sincerely

Gwerfyl Roberts
Chair
Health and Wellbeing Group
Cymdeithas yr Iaith