

2nd June 2024

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Mr Jack Sargeant MS
Chair –Petitions Committee
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P-06-1350 Re-open Dyfi Ward at Tywyn Hospital

Dear Mr Sargeant,

The petitioners have invited me to forward further observations to your Committee from the Community Hospitals Association. This follows the petitioners' receipt of a copy of the letter of 10th May 2024, from the Chief Executive of Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB), to the Petitions Committee.

I have to say that the Community Hospitals Association was deeply saddened by Ms Shillabeer's letter and by the state of healthcare provision in South Meirionnydd that it depicts.

The essence of Ms Shillabeer's reply was that although some 15 months have passed since BCUHB started their recruitment to fill departing staff's posts, and over 12 months since the community started their petition to the Senedd, restoration of necessary healthcare services has not been achieved. There has been a year of failings by the local management recruitment staff.

Successive Health Ministers have recognised the deficiencies that have long existed in BCUHB's healthcare service delivery, which is why BCUHB has been so frequently assigned "in special measures". I am sure that you personally, from your Senedd postbag, are aware of the significant number of residents in North Wales who have suffered from, or are suffering still, because of substandard BCUHB healthcare services.

I am equally aware, from the many anecdotes that we receive from the community hospitals network, and from reading reports from LLAIS, of the deficiencies in the BCUHB service. Most regrettably, the Coroner confirms that in the BCUHB area, much too frequently an inadequate healthcare service leads to tragedy.

One has to have sympathy for Ms Shillabeer! I am sure that she wishes to improve the quality of healthcare delivered in North Wales. Her predecessors, as Chief Executives, discovered that quite a few local BCUHB management teams underperformed, and that some of them were incompetent. Her predecessors failed to make all the necessary changes and Ms Shillabeer is now tackling the task.



The failure of the local BCUHB management team to recruit the necessary staff for Tywyn hospital's Dyfi ward in over a year, is an unacceptable performance. BCUHB is receiving assistance with rectifying some of its performance problems under special measures. After the long delay in filling the vacant Tywyn posts, I would have expected the Minister's office to have offered assistance to BCUHB from a competent recruitment officer. Such an action could have resolved the recruitment failings and provided badly needed training to local BCUHB management staff.

COMPARISONS

A short while ago, NHS England announced a 'year on year' increase of over 6% in the number of nurses employed in the English NHS, a real increase of 21,000. There is evidence that nurses living in urban areas, especially those with families, can be attracted to move into rural areas from major urban centres. The Community Hospitals Association has seen several such recent successes, including in Bishops Castle, where the community hospital serves part of Powys. Surely, with help, BCUHB can do better.

IMPACT ON RESIDENTS' HEALTH.

Healthcare Inspectorate Wales did review the Tywyn Hospital Dyfi ward in November 2017 and concluded that "the services provided safe and effective care". Currently the Dyfi ward is closed and hence residents are denied that "safe and effective care". Since their November 2017 visit, HIW does not appear to have evaluated the remaining healthcare services in the Tywyn area and hence has not commented on the general deficiency of healthcare service that is now provided in the area.

I can find no evidence that Public Health Wales (nationally or the service within BCUHB) has assisted either. The health and wellbeing status of the residents of South Meirionnydd does not appear to have been assessed by PHW. Demographically, we know that there is a high elderly cohort within the South Meirionnydd population. How well, or badly, they are faring seems to have been ignored.

We trust that your committee can find some method of encouraging NHS Wales to live up to its responsibilities and to restore service to the Tywyn area. We seek your committee's continued support.

Yours sincerely

Tom Brooks

Committee Member for Wales
Community Hospitals Association