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University Health Board

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Carolyn Thomas MS,  
Chair,  
Petitions Committee,  
Welsh Parliament,  
Cardiff Bay,  
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**Ein cyf / Our ref:** CS/CT(CE24/1102)

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**Dyddiad / Date:** 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2024

By email – [seneddCovid@Senedd.wales](mailto:seneddCovid@Senedd.wales)

Dear Chair,

**RE: Petition P-06-1350 Re-open Dyfi Ward at Tywyn Hospital**

Thank you for your most recent letter relating to Dyfi Ward. I note the point that the Petitions Committee has discussed this petition for the fifth time on 30 September and that this is unusual, but I sincerely hope that from our continued correspondence you can see that the health board is doing everything it can to recruit and retain staff in this very rural area, and we share the Committee's frustration that it is proving to be extremely difficult despite all efforts.

**How the service used to be provided**

Prior to the temporary closure of Dyfi ward in April 2023, there were 10 staffed beds within Tywyn Hospital. Long term vacancies meant staff were working excessive hours over and above their contracted hours as overtime and often unable to take annual leave/cancelling annual leave to ensure safe levels of staffing for the ward. Agency staff were unreliable and often cancelled at short notice which presented significant risk to patient safety.

There was no Tuag Adref service, the Health Care Support Workers were all deployed on the ward. There was no Minor Injury Service, as staff employed to work in the Minor Injuries Unit were constantly required to be in the numbers to provide safe inpatient staffing. This had a negative impact on staff retention as staff were not working in the areas that they were originally employed to work, reducing the workforce even further. At the time of the decision to temporarily close Dyfi ward, there was a deficit of four Band 5 registered nurses, one Band 6 Deputy Ward Manager and one Band 7 Ward Manager post. Eighteen months later there remains one Band 5 registered nurse vacancy and one Band 6 Deputy Ward Manager vacancy for the ward. Four Internationally Trained nurses have been recruited to work in Tywyn Hospital, however retention of staff in the area has proven difficult with a number of staff leaving to seek employment out of the area.

**Where services are currently being provided, and what are the numbers of in-patients requiring the service.**

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In response to not being able to safely open the Dyfi ward due to insufficient staffing numbers, the health board focussed on providing alternative models of delivery which are often used in more rural areas where recruitment is a challenge. These included providing health and care services directly in patient's homes, working closer with care homes in the area to provide services for their residents to retain their place for a longer period, and enabling and providing the health support for patients to spend their last few weeks and days with dignity in their own home. We have outlined these to the Committee in our various correspondence. They have been welcomed by patients and their families, care homes and the local authority.

Additional inpatient beds have been opened in Dolgellau Hospital, now at 18 beds, an overall increase of 4 beds to accommodate the Tywyn demand. Some staff from Tywyn hospital have been deployed to support the additional beds. During this time, there have been 67 inpatient admissions from the Tywyn area. This represents an average of 3.5 patients per month.

Opening the additional beds in Dolgellau and temporarily redeploying staff from Tywyn has had a positive impact on length of stay for patients. Prior to the closure of Dyfi ward, Physiotherapists and Occupational Therapists worked across both Tywyn and Dolgellau in patient wards. Since the temporary closure of Dyfi ward, therapy staff have been able to provide increased levels of therapy support to patients improving their rehabilitation and recovery, and reducing the time needed for patients to remain in hospital.

Additional community capacity has been created in the Tywyn area through implementing the Tuag Adref (Homeward Bound) service. This service supports patients to remain at home, avoiding preventable hospital admissions as well as supporting earlier discharge from hospital, providing low level support and rehabilitation at home following discharge. Health care support workers who used to work on Dyfi ward were redeployed to provide the Tuag Adref service which receives an average of 7 referrals per week.

Another service established since the temporary ward closure is the Treatment Room. This service provides a range of wound care and dressings as well as blood tests and catheter management, with a view to expand as training and competencies develop. The establishment of this service has reduced demand on primary care as well as releasing District Nursing capacity allowing them to focus on the housebound and more complex patients at home. The treatment room has been operational since July 2023 with activity in excess of 2,700 attendances.

Without the need to redeploy staff from other areas to provide the minimum staffing levels for the inpatient ward in Tywyn, this has also allowed the successful reopening of the Minor Injury Unit. The MIU is currently open 5 days per week with plans to open 7 days per week and has seen activity levels in excess of 1,300 attendances since it's reopening. The Health Board has been able to provide these high demand services due to the redeployed staff working closely with the community teams and the community itself.



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It is also worth noting that the ward area within the hospital is in daily use, occupied by the Well-being Hub, Older People's Mental Health Team, Flu and Covid vaccination clinics and Phlebotomy clinics. In addition, there are a number of outpatients clinics provided by Consultant from both BCUHB and Hywel Dda Health Board, and an IV suite has been introduced.

BCUHB staff have embraced the changes, having taken the opportunity to upskill and develop, with improved staff morale and team collaboration.

### **What are the options for the future**

As the discussion at the Petitions Committee reflected, there is a need to work with the local community and its representatives, to consider what is the best model of service delivery for this locality moving forward. There is no doubt that a safe and sustainable model of quality care is preferable to poor local care.

In wishing to try to reinstate Dyfi ward, which the health board has always stated as the intention, all efforts have been focussed on securing the required levels of staff. However, we have seen over the last 18 months the real challenge of not only recruiting but also retaining in rural areas, as in our previous correspondence to the Committee, once we recruit we have seen staff who have chosen not to stay for various reasons.

It is worth noting that, if and when recruitment is successful in securing the minimum safe staffing levels requirement for a 24/7 in patient ward, reopening Dyfi ward would undoubtedly impact on the health board's ability to maintain other clinical services and community provision in the long term. Vacancies as well as day to day absences (short and long term sickness/maternity leave/annual leave etc) would need to be covered which would mean that services such as District Nursing, Tuag Adref and Minor Injuries would be impacted (capacity reduced/service closed) as a consequence of trained staff from these services having to work on the ward to ensure the correct safe staffing levels required for the ward.

The health board has had discussion with the local community of what are the priorities for local services. The engagement workshop held in April 2024 identified a number of services which the group identified as lacking or could be improved upon in the area. These included in-patient beds provision, end of life care, respite care and improved mental health support. The workshop was attended by stakeholders including Cyngor Gwynedd, Tywyn Hospital Action Group, Local Town Councillors, Senedd Members, local nursing homes and Hywel Dda UHB. Workstreams to address the key themes are being established with the Care Closer to Home workstream looking at developing safe and sustainable pathways of care for the local population. This would include exploring closer working with the care homes and exploring the possibility of a hybrid model of working utilised in other rural areas.

On 26 November 2024, Llais North Wales held a public forum in Tywyn, to explore the impact of the closure of Dyfi Ward had had on the patients of Tywyn. Two sessions were held, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. The forum was an opportunity for the



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public to offer insights into the effects of the closure of the inpatient ward. BCUHB staff supported this workshop and outlined what had been done to mitigate the closure of the inpatient ward whilst ensuring that the health needs of the people of Tywyn are met.

Reflecting the discussion of the Petitions Committee and working closely with LLAIS, further engagement is now planned with the community in early 2025 to discuss a more sustainable way forward.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carol Shillabeer'.

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**Carol Shillabeer**  
**Prif Weithredwr/Chief Executive**