

P-06-1544 Take urgent action to improve the NHS in West Wales, and address the crisis at Glangwili hospital - Correspondence from the Petitioner to the Committee,

[Note: This public version has been redacted to remove personal patient data, primarily that of the petitioner].

Carolyn Thomas MS  
Chair  
Petitions Committee

Dear Carolyn

Many thanks for progressing the petition "Petition P-06-1544 Take urgent action to improve the NHS in West Wales, and address the crisis at Glangwili hospital".

I am grateful that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care has been approached and has provided a response. I understand from his letter that his position is that the Health Boards are responsible for their own performance, however I would respectfully ask what the role of the elected members is, if not to act when members of the public repeatedly reach out to inform them that this approach is ineffective?

When reaching out to the communities across West Wales to share this petition I was informed by many of a feeling of "what's the point" in signing a petition that will "just be ignored". People cited a multitude of petitions (some with very significant signatory numbers) that have been submitted to Welsh Government Ministers about the dire situations in Hywel Dda UHB area and that have met with extremely muted responses at best, and in most cases no action at all.

Campaigns to preserve vital services at Bronglais, Worthybush and Prince Phillip have had active involvement with the Health Boards, and with elected members but with very limited and muted action to evidence that these voices are being listened to in decision-making as services continue to be reduced or withdrawn, putting further pressure on the already beleaguered Glangwili Hospital.

Since setting up the petition I have been approached by staff at Glangwili who say that the situation there is worsening. And in August this year a visit to A&E revealed that they continue to lose staff who are demoralised and disheartened by the policy structures within which they are expected to work. Staff themselves told me that they were sharing the petition between themselves to support the request for urgent help to address the concerning issues that persist.

As you can imagine my motivation for setting up this petition was based on my own very troubling experiences, however as I have mentioned in the process of setting up and sharing this petition I have been approached by many people, a significant number further afield who have had equally troubling experiences in other Health Board areas across Wales. This appears therefore not isolated to one Health Board area.

It's not just limited to our West Wales Hospitals, our local GP practice has the word "incompetent" cleaned off but still clearly visible as someone has spray painted on the side of the practice. A Healthcare worker linked to the practice told me that they felt unable to do their job as effectively as they wanted because of limitations caused by the need as directed by Welsh Government to collect health data from patients which took up appointment time and got in the way of focusing on patient needs.

Feelings here clearly run high, and people have sadly turned to less palatable methods of trying desperately to get the attention of someone, anyone, to please listen and act. I believe this is because people are scared. Terrified at what will happen to us when we try to reach

out for support only to find that it cannot bear our weight.

To those one step removed this possibly feels like people asking for something unreasonable, but to those of us who live in the rural parts of Wales where services are being withdrawn or restricted it feels like our lives are at risk and there is no safety net. There are no other options for us here as we don't live in cities that have a selection of private medical facilities as a back-up.

My own experience is that Glangwili has suffered a significant decline in recent years: unfortunately a family member needed treatment during the pandemic, however they were quickly triaged and admitted to a ward where they were intensively treated for a number of days. The same family member experienced a recurrence of the condition in early 2024 and the experience this time was desperate!

The A&E Department had no beds available to them within the hospital, with the Clinical Decisions Unit being used as a make-shift ward and therefore being unable to function correctly as a CDU. Staff within the CDU had been advised to leave patients in chairs due to this area "not being a ward". This meant that very unwell patients were seated in chairs for 24 hours a day. Some very kind staff were in the habit of visiting the Theatres at the end of each day to seek trolleys for patients to have an opportunity to lay flat overnight, and they would return these trolleys each morning. When I raised this situation with the staff they urged me to complain and said that they agreed that the situation was not right and that patients should be admitted to appropriate wards to receive the correct treatment and care for their needs.

When I raised my concerns with a Ward Manager they advised that the solution that the Health Board was pursuing was to buy better chairs! This felt a clear example of a situation that was not able to be corrected by those within the Health Board. Presumably Health Board Management have the understanding of the role of the CDU and the need to improve the ward move-on to free up space in the CDU and the knock on that this has for patient care in A&E, so one can only assume that this solution was developed because of lack of funding or resources to make the real improvements necessary to actually change the situation for patients.

Surely this is not the state of our Wales NHS? The public service above all others that Wales' heritage suggests that we should be the flagship for.

As you can tell I have been spoken to by a great many people over the months since starting this petition and the vast majority say that their interactions with frontline staff has been exemplary and that they have nothing but great respect for those who continue to try to provide medical care in the face of such adversity. Though many have no faith in any of the structures above those frontline staff to make any meaningful and genuine improvement to the situation.

As those who are elected to oversee the wellbeing of the people of Wales, if Welsh Government Ministers won't step in to ensure that the policies and financing of the resources are correct and create the right environment to resolve the current crises across Hywel Dda and other Health Boards in Wales, then, respectfully: what is it that our Ministers are for?

I hope that the contents of this letter, whilst at times provocative, demonstrate to you the depth of feeling and need for Ministers intervention in this matter.

Yours sincerely

Christine Castle