



21st September 2024

Ms Carolyn Thomas MS
Chair –Petitions Committee
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P-06-1350 Re-open Dyfi Ward at Tywyn Hospital

Dear Ms Thomas,

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 15th August 2024, from the Chief Executive of Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB), to the Petitions Committee.

EMBARASSMENT

This saga has now continued for 18 months and is a considerable embarrassment to the Community Hospitals Association and I suspect to the NHS in Wales. I list below an abbreviated synopsis of promises made by BCUHB management and its admissions of lack of competence in staff recruitment.

I give presentations to community hospital organisations overseas as well as in the UK. I have given presentations recently to Italy and Uganda and we are pleased that Japanese representatives are visiting shortly. When the challenges to community hospitals in Wales are discussed, they cannot understand how we can fail to recruit staff to a community hospital ward after 18 months of trying.

AN OUTLINE TIMETABLE OF EVENTS

Mr Mabon ap Gwynfor MS and Ms Saville-Roberts MP met with Betsi Cadwaladr on April 14 2023 and released a statement "We also question whether the Board understand how to deliver health care in rural Wales." Events since then has proven their concerns about the Board's competence to be correct.

On 12 May 2023, Health Minister Eluned Morgan visited Tywyn Hospital and expressed optimism. It is now clear that she was misled.

On May 25 2023 the Health Board formally answered a question about the Tywyn ward stating, "Once we have successfully recruited the minimum number of staff to safely open in-patient beds again, we will do so." 16 months later they have not yet succeeded in recruiting the promised staff.

On 15 June 2023, the office of Eluned Morgan Secretary of Health and Social Services wrote to Tywyn residents, "the health board will continue in its efforts to recruit to vacancies in order to safely restore inpatient services at Tywyn Hospital as soon as possible".

On 24 July 2023, Ms Ffion Johnstone, Integrated Health Community Director (West) wrote "We have made some progress in recruitment. We have appointed 1 Band 5, the Band 6 Deputy ward manager and Band 7 Ward manager post. We still require 3 Band 5 staff".



A month later on 23 August 2023 Ms Ffion Johnstone, Integrated Health Community Director (West) wrote “Unfortunately, we continue to be 3 x Band 5 registered nurses short of what we require to be able to reopen the beds on Dyfi ward.”

Ms Johnstone also illustrated the inadequacy of the recruitment approach taken when she wrote

“The latest advert for the remaining posts did not attract any suitable or shortlistable candidates, and we are going back out to advert again in a further attempt to recruit. We are supplementing our national advertising with local campaigns targeting the recent Race the Train event and the Food Festival as an example. We also have a targeted social media campaign which is targeting specific professional groups, such as nursing, to advertise job opportunities in the area.”

Sadly, there remained an absence of focus in the recruitment by BCUHB with no out of area recruitment opportunities being identified and targeted for Tywyn.

On September 28th 2023 at a BCUHB Board meeting, the recruitment ‘fiasco’ for Tywyn was described as

“All avenues are being progressed to recruit including national adverts:

Dates that the Band 5 post for Tywyn has been out to advert:

- 1. March 23- closing date 23/03/23- No suitable candidates*
- 2. April 23- closing date 17/04/2023- No suitable candidates*
- 3. May 23- Closing date 08/05/2023- No suitable candidates*
- 4. May 23- Closing date 29/05/2023- Interviews held 08/06 and post appointed too. Delays in re-advertising following interviews due to a period of time where Trac was unavailable and the need to progress with some actions within the system to progress appointment prior to being able to re-advertise post.*
- 5. July 23- closing date 16/08/2023 – No suitable candidates*

Following the last cycle of recruitment the post has had to go through due process again as establishment control approval had expired.”

On October 11th 2023, Ms Carol Shillabeer told the Petitions Committee that she and the Chair had made a commitment to attend a public meeting in Tywyn regarding the ward closure and other service withdrawals and reductions.

On 21st November 2023, LLAIS and local residents organised a public meeting at which senior Health Board officials and 120 residents were present. Many residents told of how they had suffered because of the Tywyn Hospital closed services. The Board provided no optimism that they could soon restore service.

On 28 November 2023, Ms Saville-Roberts MP raised the recruitment difficulties at Tywyn in the House of Commons. Hansard records that Mr Robert Jenrick laid the failings to recruit on the devolved Welsh Government.

On 8th February 2024, Ms Shillabeer wrote to the Petitions Committee once again and stated “We will be able to provide a date for the reopening of Dyfi Ward in Tywyn Hospital once our new recruits have been fully signed off as competent to work independently and the remaining 2 vacancies are filled.”

On 2nd March 2024, the Welsh Government announced that “250 doctors and nurses are coming to Wales under an agreement with the Kerala Government”.



On 10th May 2024, Ms Shillabeer admitted the Board management failings in the field of recruitment by writing to the Petitions Committee saying “It has been a significant challenge to recruit despite numerous attempts”.

In a reference to overseas recruitment she wrote:

“I am very pleased that an additional two internationally trained nurses have been appointed and arrangements for these two nurses to travel to the UK are in progress with a view to filling the remaining vacant posts in Tywyn hospital. We are yet to have a firm timeline and they will of course need to complete the required competencies upon arrival.”

The earmarked staff still haven’t arrived in Tywyn! On August 15th, Ms Shillabeer wrote to the Petitions committee confessing “we unfortunately remain unable to provide an expected date for the re-opening of Dyfi inpatient ward.”

OPTIMISM

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