

P-06-1350 reopen Dyfi Ward at Tywyn Hospital now April 2025

Two years on, the tragic situation at Tywyn Hospital has not been resolved. It is most upsetting and sad to find that the inpatients ward at Tywyn Hospital is still closed and it is now precisely two years since BCUHB shut it down.

The health board has spent most of the last two years offering up many reasons for closing the ward and for keeping it closed; these include being insistent that it did not have the required number of staff, that it was unable to recruit staff, that there was insufficient accommodation for staff, that there were more beds available in Dolgellau than Tywyn, that only 4 beds were needed in Tywyn, and the list goes on. Many of these excuses proved to be unfounded and inaccurate. Through reading the health board's own documents, it was discovered for example, before closing Tywyn, that 16 beds had always been factored equally in calculations for both Tywyn and Dolgellau. The board had never recruited enough nurses to open Tywyn's inpatients ward in full when it was opened in 2017. Now that there are enough staff the inpatients remains closed. To state that only 4 beds were and are needed for Tywyn is completely wrong; BCUHB's own documents show that there was a demand for 87 admissions between April 2022 and March 2023, with an average stay per patient of above 30 days. Almost 90% of these admissions were referrals from Bronglais, Aberystwyth or from local GP's, and because Bronglais is in a different health board, BCUHB have not counted these in some of the figures it then used to calculate '4 beds for Tywyn'. In fact, of course patients could come from the wider population of North and Mid Wales.

Over the course of the last two years the board often changed its mind about how many and which staff were required, at times stating that it needed several nurses at different band levels, when at the same time no live adverts were being publicised. Against the odds, there are now enough staff to reopen the ward. Three months ago, at the Annual General Meeting of the Tywyn Hospital Appeal Fund, the Ward Manager of Tywyn Hospital stated that there were sufficient staff to open the inpatients facility. More recently this fact has been repeated by other staff working at Tywyn Hospital. The action group have also been informed that if the ward is not opened soon then more nurses will leave to work elsewhere. Retention of staff by BCUHB is a problem, for example, six months ago, two nurses who should have been working in Tywyn, (but were placed in Dolgellau because Tywyn wasn't open), left to go and work in Scotland. An additional concern is that Dolgellau Hospital has recently had it's MIU reopened, which requires nursing staff, yet at the same time nurses who should be working in Tywyn are still travelling to Dolgellau; meaning yet again that BCUHB is prioritising Dolgellau over Tywyn.

Now that there are enough staff, the health board have changed their rhetoric, Carol Shilabeer's latest reply to the petitions committee states that it will now have to 'further consider what is the best sustainable model of service delivery to meet the needs of this locality moving forward'. BCUHB are moving backwards not forwards, depriving individuals of the right to stay in hospital when required.

For almost two years the board has been making excuses for not opening the hospital to inpatients, about not having 'safe' levels or enough staff, but has instead promoted and congratulated itself about the number of alternative and peripheral services it provides, and how these services somehow mitigate against opening a brand-new state of the art facility for real inpatients. Many of these services were provided before closing the inpatients. Now that there are enough staff, the inpatients department will still not be opening because the health board now choose to deflect the matter, and say it needs to 'engage further with the local community'. The health board do not need to interact with the local community to find out their opinion about what services should be provided; it already knows! The various public meetings, 'workshops', events held during the last two years (listed in the last reply of the action group to the petitions committee) have all been enough to inform the health board that it is

expected to provide adequate health services for South Gwynedd which include those for inpatients. The petition itself, containing over 5,500 signatures, demonstrates the strength of public opinion – ‘reopen Dyfi Ward at Tywyn Hospital now’! The health board have spent almost two years saying that they are still trying to recruit and retain enough staff; but now they have enough, they are still determined to keep the facility closed. The health board are meant to be the experts at delivering health services to their populations, they do not need to ask people what these should be.

Having an inpatients provision here in Tywyn, housed in a state-of-the-art brand-new facility, paid for with public money and donations, should not need justifying and has been stated time and again. Providing a service for inpatients is completely different from other services, some of which are provided at home, some in Tywyn Hospital or Tywyn Surgery - minor injuries, treatment rooms, clinics, appointments and so on. The health board’s own statistics show how much the inpatients facility should be used. The news is full of waiting lists, bed blocking and ambulance queues. There are many first-hand accounts from locals, where people have died at home, where there have been insufficient palliative care staff to cover, where patients have been sent home on their own without a care package in place, or been transferred to facilities far away, where relatives who cannot drive have to pay for taxis to visit relatives, where public transport is not feasible, and so on. These individuals did not receive the care they deserved and have not been treated with the dignity expected from a public health service. Although Carol Shilabeer spends an awful lot of energy on telling us how popular and successful and valued the other services have been, her statements lack factual evidence and recognition of the many accounts we hear from real people suffering because it is closed.

It is hardly credible that BCUHB and the Welsh Government do not wish to provide a public health service that meets the needs of its populations. The letter to the petitions committee from Jeremy Miles, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care for Wales, lacks the critique, depth of professional knowledge or objectivity expected. His letter reiterates what a health board in special measures have told him, without any reference to the evidence, the facts or the truth. His letter is an abdication of the responsibility of the Welsh Government, which is to ensure that an inclusive, high quality health service is provided for the people across the whole of Wales. What is the Welsh Government going to do to open this facility to meet the health needs of the local and wider population and why has it done nothing to date?

The group continues to endeavour to demonstrate in our replies to the Petitions Committee how BCUHB have been negligent in their mismanagement of our facilities and health service. There is no reinforcement of the standards and attitudes required, and the continued obfuscation is a serious matter of concern. Two years on, the Health Board do not want to reopen the inpatients ward and the 5,528 people who signed this petition have been let down.

Yours sincerely

Jane Barraclough

Tywyn Hospital Action Group