

# Children and Young People Committee

CYP(4)-05-12 Paper 1

## Neonatal Services in Wales

### Evidence from the Minister for Health and Social Services

#### Welsh Government written update to the Children and Young People Committee: Short Inquiry into Neonatal Services

##### Recommendation 1.

**We recommend that the Welsh Government should ensure that a review of capacity be undertaken by the All Wales Neonatal Network, to include current staffing and activity levels.**

##### **Current Position**

The All Wales Neonatal Network is a sub committee of the Welsh Health Specialised Services Committee (WHSSC), where Local Health Boards work collectively to plan and fund specialised services. The Network undertook a review of neonatal care capacity across Wales in October 2010. Local Health Boards developed individual local neonatal action plans in response and the Neonatal Network Steering Group has received a summary of these plans. Since then, the Network has undertaken a second more detailed review of capacity and the outcome of this is due to be considered by the Neonatal Network Steering Group on 30 January 2012.

##### Recommendation 2.

**We recommend that the Welsh Government, in assessing future requirements of the service, should pay particular attention to the increasing birth rate in Wales.**

##### **Current Position**

The Neonatal Network has used historical data and 2010 data on birth rates in assessing future requirements of their neonatal services.

##### Recommendation 3.

**We recommend that the Welsh Government should ensure that there is capacity across all services to meet future demand.**

##### **Current Position**

The Neonatal Network has and will continue to review capacity across Wales to ensure it meets demand now and in the future.

##### Recommendation 4.

**We recommend that the Welsh Government should ensure that staffing ratio guidelines, in compliance with British Association of Perinatal Medicine (BAPM) 2001 minimum standards and as set out in the All Wales Neonatal Standards, are met, but not through a reduction in cot numbers.**

### **Current Position**

A comprehensive review of the nursing workforce, was undertaken by the Neonatal Network's Nursing and Therapies sub group and presented to the Neonatal Network's Steering Group in June 2011. The report provided a review of current nursing establishments across Wales and an analysis of the shortfall in establishments to meet the All Wales Neonatal Standards. It also detailed actual staff in post against establishments.

Local Health Boards are addressing the shortfalls identified as part of their local neonatal action plans.

### **Recommendation 5.**

**We recommend that the Welsh Government should put in place measures to ensure that neonatal units achieve occupancy levels that are capable of meeting the fluctuations in demand.**

### **Current Position**

The Neonatal Network's reviews of capacity outline current occupancies at Intensive care, high dependency care and special care levels and identified cot numbers required to achieve 70% occupancy levels for critical care and 80% occupancy levels for special care.

Local Health Boards are addressing occupancy levels as part of their local neonatal action plans.

### **Recommendation 6.**

**We recommend that the Welsh Government should require the All Wales Neonatal Network to develop a plan to deliver the All Wales Neonatal Standards within a clear set of timescales and to make public the action it will take to ensure the standards are met.**

### **Current Position**

The Neonatal Network undertook a baseline review of compliance with the All Wales Neonatal Standards in December 2010. The outcome informed the development of the Network's All Wales Action Plan. It is recognised that a number of the key actions in the 2008 Neonatal Standards required an all Wales approach and the Network has taken forward a programme of activities to support compliance against the standards. An update on this All Wales Action Plan is due to be considered by the Neonatal Network Steering Group on 30 January 2012.

### **Recommendation 7.**

**We recommend that the Welsh Government should ensure that rigorous procedures are in place to monitor the implementation of the All Wales Neonatal Standards.**

### **Current Position**

The Neonatal Network monitors implementation of the All Wales Neonatal standards at individual Local Health Board level on a quarterly basis.

**Recommendation 8.**

**We recommend that the Welsh Government should establish a Cot Locator system, to ensure that cots are allocated on an efficient basis and to reduce unnecessary transfers between units. The system should be compatible with systems in England.**

**Current Position**

The Neonatal Network has developed and implemented a template for collecting cot status across Wales. It is being used on a daily basis by the transport transfer teams to locate available cots. At a glance, it gives a picture of critical care capacity across Wales and supports individual Units in facilitating transfers as well as supporting the return of babies back to their home unit.

**Recommendation 9.**

**We recommend that the Welsh Government should ensure that the clinical network and database is working effectively as soon as possible.**

**Current Position**

The Neonatal Network is fully established as a sub committee of the Welsh Health Specialised Services Committee, where Local Health Boards work collectively to plan and fund specialised services.

All Neonatal Units in Wales commenced using the BadgerNet clinical information system in January 2011. The system can be used to generate clinical discharge summaries as well as enabling audit and the production of an annual report. The Neonatal Network Clinical Information sub group, and WHSSC continue to monitor progress. All Neonatal Units in Wales are using BadgerNet as the primary tool for admission and discharge of babies.

**Recommendation 10.**

**We recommend that the Welsh Government should ensure that the 12-hour transport service is in place and operational as soon as possible.**

**Current Position**

In January 2011 neonatal transport services commenced in both North and South Wales, providing dedicated transport teams capable of retrieving babies during the 12 hour period 8.00 am – 8.00pm. The Neonatal Network, via its Transport sub group, has overseen the recruitment of the teams and has worked with the Welsh Ambulance Service (WAST) on the design and procurement of a dedicated ambulance and crew in South Wales. In July 2011, I officially launched the Cymru inter Hospital Acute Neonatal Transfer Service (CHANTS).

In North Wales the transport team continues to use the services of WAST as the transfer numbers did not necessitate a dedicated vehicle. Both services are reporting excellent outcomes with 495 transfers undertaken in South

Wales and 120 in North Wales. The number of transfers by English transport teams have significantly reduced, since the Welsh service became operational.

**Recommendation 11.**

**We recommend that the Welsh Government should keep under review the effectiveness of the 12-hour transport service, in particular in relation to meeting demands on the service and patients' needs. Further to this, we recommend that, at an appropriate time, consideration should be given to whether a 24-hour transport service would better meet patients' needs.**

**Current Position**

The capacity of the transport service to undertake all transfers within the current 12 hour services was reviewed by the Neonatal Network Steering Group in July 2011. The number of transfers performed 'out of hours' in the first six months of service, did not indicate that an extension of the 12 hour service was required at this stage.

Transfer numbers will continue to be monitored by the Neonatal Network.

**Recommendation 12.**

**We recommend that the Welsh Government should ensure that the All Wales Neonatal Network regularly reviews arrangements for cross-border transfers of patients, to ensure that they are effective.**

**Current Position**

The Neonatal Network holds regular meetings with the transport teams in the Midlands and North West England and work on staff competencies and the training is being shared. Meetings have also taken place with the South West Neonatal Network and the Specialised Commissioning Group in England to discuss cross border flows and share good practice.

Established clinical pathways are already in place for babies requiring tertiary care outside of Wales and additional arrangements have recently been put in place between the Networks, to support the effective repatriation of babies back to their home Unit.

**Recommendation 13.**

**We recommend that the Welsh Government, in conjunction with the Health Boards, puts in place measures, as a matter of urgency, to address the shortfall in medical and nursing staff to ensure services are safe.**

**Current Position**

All Local Health Boards have neonatal action plans in place to address shortfalls in staffing levels for safe and effective care. These action plans are also informing the wider service modernisation plans currently being developed by Local Health Boards to ensure all their services are safe and sustainable.

**Recommendation 14.**

**We recommend that the Welsh Government should ensure that procedures are put in place to ensure that neonatal nurses can access education and training.**

**Current Position**

The Neonatal Network, via its Nursing and Therapies sub group, has undertaken a review of neonatal education and training. An 'All Wales Framework for Neonatal Nurse Training' has been developed and circulated to Local Health Boards. The framework outlines a vision and associated action to move nurse training and education forward in Wales over the next 1-3 years. Local Health Boards have been asked to undertake an analysis of staff needs at level 2 Units, develop comprehensive rotation programmes with Level 3 Units and identify specific areas of practice where updating or training is required.

**Recommendation 15.**

**We recommend that the Welsh Government should explore with relevant professional bodies, including the Royal College of Nursing and Royal College of Midwives, the development of a neonatology speciality.**

**Current Position**

The Royal College of Nursing is undertaking work to develop a competency framework for neonatal nursing and is being supported by the Neonatal Network set up by Welsh Government. Welsh Government officials are being kept apprised of the work as it develops.

**Recommendation 16.**

**We recommend that the Government should ensure better integration of, and joint working between, neonatal and maternity services.**

**Current Position**

Obstetric and midwifery representatives are members of the Network Neonatal Steering Group and the Network team hold separate meetings with these representatives to share work plans and discuss and agree actions. The Neonatal Network Clinical lead is also a member of the All Wales Maternity Services Implementation Group and of a number of sub groups taking forward the Implementation of 'A Strategic Vision for maternity services in Wales'.

**Recommendation 17.**

**We recommend that the Welsh Government should ensure that Health Boards review their current arrangements for supporting parents of**

**special care babies, to address in particular: practical guidance for health professionals on identifying parents' needs; helping parents to be involved in their baby's care; and providing support to parents as they gradually become the main carers.**

### **Current Position**

Local Health Boards report progress on work in this area under the All Wales Neonatal Standards: Standard 4 - Full or partial compliance is reported with this standard, with all Local Health Boards providing resources to support parent training, as well as access to a range of other support services. Full compliance is evident regarding breast feeding facilities and support.

Work has been completed by the Neonatal Network to map parent support groups across Wales. The Neonatal Network, via its parent representation, is establishing links with all support groups to ensure the views of parents and families are heard.

### **Recommendation 18.**

**We recommend that the Welsh Government should ensure that sufficient accommodation is provided for parents, particularly in the lead centres. As part of this, we recommend that the use of transitional care units should be considered.**

### **Current Position**

The Neonatal Network is also working with BLISS, the Special Care Baby Charity to audit Local Health Boards against its Baby Charter Standards which are due to be launched in February 2012.

The Bliss baby friendly audit tool will help identify the facilities available for parents to 'room in' prior to babies being taken home. The Neonatal Network will also audit separately accommodation for parents across all units in Wales. The outcome of this audit will be presented to the Neonatal Steering Group being held in July.