

WF 30

Ymchwiliad i gynaliadwyedd y gweithlu iechyd a gofal cymdeithasol  
Inquiry into the sustainability of the health and social care workforce

Ymateb gan: Coleg Brenhinol y Patholegwyr

Response from: Royal College of Pathologists



Inquiry into the sustainability of the health and social care workforce

Response by Dr Esther Youd on behalf of the Royal College of Pathologists

1. Do we have an accurate picture of the current health and care workforce? Are there any data gaps?
  - 1.1 No. One of the roles of the Royal College of Pathologists Wales Regional Council is to monitor workforce issues. This is an ongoing work stream for the Council. As a small nation it is easier to compile this information, however there are significant difficulties in comparing across Wales and there is no uniform method of gathering data, no set criteria on which to draw comparisons on staffing numbers and skill mix for a given region/Health Board/population.
  - 1.2 At Health Board or national levels there is no data gathering or monitoring, and no succession planning.
  - 1.3 The Royal College of Pathologists produces guidance on staffing levels but in many cases these are not given appropriate weight when planning and delivering a service.
  - 1.4 In many pathology specialties (histopathology, microbiology, haematology) this paucity of data and of forward planning is resulting in severe recruitment difficulties at consultant and clinical scientist level.
  - 1.5 In many Health Boards locum staff (both at scientist and consultant level) are utilised. It is more difficult to capture data on the use of locums and this may give an inaccurate picture of the workforce employed and of the recruitment gaps.
  
2. Is there a clear understanding of the Welsh Government's vision for health and care services and the workforce needed to deliver this?
  - 2.1 On the ground there is little understanding of the Welsh Government's vision.
  - 2.2 Laboratory medicine and the pathology specialties are vital in delivering the vast majority of patient care, however, this delivery is often taken for granted. Workforce issues in direct patient facing areas tend to be the focus (eg. nurse recruitment, A&E doctors, ITU doctors, surgeons, GPs), but without pathology these healthcare professionals cannot provide patient care.
  - 2.3 Concepts such as Prudent Healthcare can be delivered by an appropriately skilled and resourced workforce in pathology, saving money and time elsewhere.
  
3. How well-equipped is the workforce to meet future health and care needs?
  - 3.1 Within pathology specialties there is a mixed picture. Advances in technology put pathology specialties at the forefront of changing patient care. For example genetic testing, identification of bacteria.
  - 3.2 However, adoption of technology is often slow and changes in workforce are often difficult.
  - 3.3 Demonstrating the impact of pathology investment in the savings made elsewhere in the healthcare provision is extremely complex, and therefore the required changes in workforce are difficult.
  - 3.4 Specific challenges exist in histopathology, particularly around cancer care, as the incidence of cancer increases, and there is likely to be an increased requirement for consultant histopathologists. Yet recruitment of consultants is challenging across all of Wales and significant gaps exist in every Health Board.
  
4. What are the factors that influence recruitment and retention of staff across Wales?
  - opportunities for young people to find out about/experience the range of NHS and social care careers
  - education and training
  - pay and terms of employment/contract
  - are there particular issues in some geographic areas, rural or urban areas, or areas of deprivation?

- 4.1 Pathologists and scientists across Wales offer informal opportunities for young people to gain work experience, promoting scientific and medical careers in pathology specialties.
- 4.2 There tends to be a focus on the obvious healthcare careers, nursing, physiotherapy, medicine (surgeons, GPs) rather than the smaller specialties.
- 4.3 The Royal College of Pathologists has an active programme of public engagement activity to promote careers.
- 4.4 There are significant problems with recruitment of consultants in pathology specialties including histopathology, haematology and microbiology.
- 4.5 Training programmes in Wales have a good reputation and produce excellent consultants.
- 4.6 In some areas there has developed a disconnect between the changes in medical training and the design of consultant posts, for example in microbiology changes in the curriculum have resulted in a change in the way that trainees work and the type of job they are interested in.
- 4.7 There are significant geographical difficulties with recruitment, especially in West Wales and North Wales. These challenges in recruitment threaten the viability of services and patient care.
- 4.8 Expansion of training schemes, to include an increase in numbers of training posts and their distribution across Health Boards, would be of benefit. As an example, in 2016 there were at least 6 excellent applicants for histopathology posts from Wales, but only one post available.
- 4.8 The Royal College of Pathologists has identified the training, recruitment and retention of the right workforce as a priority for Wales and looks forward to working with Welsh Government on this.