

Cyfarwyddwr Cyffredinol Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol/
Prif Weithredwr GIG Cymru
Grŵp Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol

Director General Health and Social Services/
NHS Wales Chief Executive
Health and Social Services Group



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Nick Ramsay AM
Chair
Public Accounts Committee

Our Ref: AG/AE/SB

28 April 2017

Dear Mr Ramsay

The use of automated medicine cabinets within NHS Wales

During the Public Accounts Committee's evidence session on 6 March, I undertook to provide the Committee with details of the current use of automated medicine vending cabinets across health boards. I also agreed to provide a further, more detailed, clarification of the wider debate regarding the actual benefits which might be realised from the use of automated medicine vending cabinets.

Current use of automated ward vending cabinets

Since 2011-12, the Welsh Government has invested over £4.5m in the procurement of automated ward vending machines in hospitals in Wales; this includes over £1.8m in 2016-17.

At the end of March, health boards and Velindre NHS Trust will have installed automated medicine vending on 119 hospital wards. In addition to their installation on wards, automated medicine vending cabinets have been installed in 74 other clinical areas where medicines are routinely used, including Accident and Emergency Departments, theatres, Medical Admission Units, Intensive Therapy Units and GP out of hours services. Additionally, automated medicine vending cabinets are being installed by the Wales Ambulance Services Trust at Accident and Emergency Departments and ambulance stations across Wales.

Realising the benefits of automated medicine vending

There is good evidence that automated medicine vending cabinets reduce medication administration errors when compared to use of stock medicine cabinets or trolleys. Research also suggests benefits from reduced nursing time spent on medicines-related activities; increased nursing time for patient contact; improved stock inventories and ordering processes; and increased security, traceability and reduced potential for diversion of medicines, may also be achievable.

Whilst automated medicine vending cabinets are associated with these benefits, the scale at which these can be achieved may be offset by the practicalities of their use and the pre-existing procedures and processes in place in individual clinical areas. Largely, this is because there are several ways in which automated ward vending cabinets may be used ranging from using them to stock traditional ward medicines trolleys or near patient areas to using them as a source to administer medicines directly to patients. The benefits that might be realised as a result of introducing the use of cabinets are highly dependent on the way in which medicines are stored and administered in a particular clinical area.

During the Committee's evidence session, the Chief Pharmaceutical Officer explained that on wards which have implemented arrangements for one-stop dispensing and use of patients' own drugs the scale of benefits of automated ward vending cabinets are likely to be smaller than on those wards where more traditional ward medicines trolleys remain in use.

In general, health boards have approached the introduction of automated medicine vending cabinets in such a way as to prioritise those areas, such as accident and emergency departments, where patients are unlikely to use their own medicines; where prompt access to medicines is essential; and where the safety, efficiency and security benefits of cabinets are likely to be most significant.

The Chief Pharmaceutical Officer is continuing to work with the NHS Chief Pharmacists Group to develop our approach to the use of automated medicine vending cabinets and we will continue to prioritise capital investment in cabinets in all areas where there are significant realisable benefits associated with their introduction.

Yours sincerely



Dr Andrew Goodall

cc: Andrew Evans, Chief Pharmaceutical Officer, Welsh Government
Frank Atherton, Chief Medical Officer, Welsh Government
CGU Mailbox
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