



Welsh Language Standards for Health Services

Royal College of General Practitioners Wales response to the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee

Monday 05 March 2018

RCGP Wales welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Welsh Government's recently published Welsh Language Standards for Health Services.

The Royal College of General Practitioners Wales represents a network of around 2,000 GPs, aiming to improve care for patients. We work to encourage and maintain the highest standards of general medical practice and act as the voice of GPs on resources, education, training, research and clinical standards.

We note that primary care services will only be subject to these regulations if they are directly run by a health board. In general practice this could include managed practices, out of hours services, and services delivered in settings such as a prison.

We hope due consideration is given to the potential of recruitment to these services being hindered by the need to comply to the regulations. General practice is facing severe recruitment difficulties, and if these standards are seen as a barrier to working as a GP these difficulties will be magnified. We need to attract the best GPs to work in Wales, rather than selecting doctors on their ability to speak Welsh.

The majority of primary care services are run independently from a local health board, and these services will not be subject to the regulations. We are supportive of this approach; as outlined in the Explanatory Memorandum local health boards do not have direct influence over individual providers. The Welsh Government has proposed that a small number of Welsh language duties on independent primary care providers will be prescribed through contracts or terms of service agreements.

RCGP Wales welcomes attempts to support the Welsh language in general practice, and would like patients to be able to speak the language of their choice. There is already significant effort in many practices across Wales to ensure this is the case.

Clear communication is key to consultancy which means patients speaking in their first language can be beneficial. The converse of this, however, is that GPs must have a strong grasp on the language to be able to consult professionally in Welsh. Some GPs who have Welsh as a first language can find doing consultations in Welsh difficult, as they do not have the technical words in Welsh.

We believe attempts to increase its use in general practice will be most effective if the pressures on the profession are kept in mind. There are many practical barriers in primary care that may limit the availability of the Welsh language. A shortage of GPs will inevitably limit the number of Welsh speaking GPs, and workload pressures can make it difficult for non-Welsh speaking GPs to learn the language. Any prescribed duties will need to recognise these factors.

Tackling the pressures on general practice may provide an opportunity to enhance Welsh language provision. For example, a constructive solution would be measures to attract more Welsh speaking GPs to the profession.

We also believe there is scope for the Welsh language in primary care to be enhanced through multidisciplinary working. Working collaboratively with other healthcare professionals should be able to expand Welsh language provision. This can be done outside of these regulations, as multidisciplinary working remains in a relatively early stage of development and we do not want to see any perceived barriers that prevent the transfer of professionals into primary care. This is particularly pertinent for recruitment from other areas in the UK and areas where Welsh is not traditionally spoken.