

Briefing for the Petitions Committee

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 19 Mawrth 2019

Petitions Committee | 19 March 2019

Petition number: P-05-866

Petition title: Sepsis Public Awareness Campaign – Wales

Text of petition:

44,000 people in the UK lose their lives to sepsis every year. Every 3.5 seconds, someone in the world dies from sepsis.

We are calling on the Welsh Government to undertake a Sepsis Public Awareness Campaign to reduce unnecessary deaths and improve outcomes for survivors and all affected.

In memory of Chloe Christopher and everyone who has been affected by Sepsis in Wales.

Background

Prevalence of sepsis

Sepsis has been described as one of the most common but least recognised illnesses in both the developed and developing world. It is a life-threatening condition that arises when the body's response to an infection injures its own tissues and organs. If not recognised early and treated promptly, sepsis can lead to multiple organ failure and death. Rapid intervention with antibiotics and intravenous fluids is vital to ensure the best chance of survival.

The UK Sepsis Trust's [Sepsis Manual](#) 2017-18 states that conservative estimates would suggest that there are at least 250,000 cases of sepsis in the UK each year, with at least 46,000 deaths and a direct cost to the NHS of at least £1.5 billion. In July 2018, Public Health Wales estimated that there are around 2,200 deaths per year in Wales as a result of sepsis¹.

¹ National Assembly for Wales, Health Social Care and Sport Committee, [5 July 2018](#), Para 134

Sepsis claims more lives than breast, bowel and prostate cancer put together, and is one of the chief causes of [maternal death](#) during and after pregnancy.

Incidence of sepsis in the UK is likely to be underestimated. A 2015 [report](#) by the National Confidential Enquiry into Patient Outcome and Death (NCEPOD) for example, found that where patients with sepsis had died, it was only recorded on the death certificate in 40% of cases. The recorded incidence of sepsis is increasing by approximately [11.5%](#) each year. This may in part be due to greater awareness and more reliable recording, but the ageing population and greater use of invasive interventions are also significant factors. Antimicrobial resistance may also play a part.

Members of the Health, Social Care and Sport (HSCS) Committee discussed sepsis with Public Health Wales during a general scrutiny session on [5 July 2018](#). In [correspondence](#) following the session, Public Health Wales told the Committee that data is not currently available on the number of people who have survived sepsis but experience a reduced quality of life as a result. Public Health Wales is however undertaking work to develop a sepsis registry in Wales, which it states should lead to a greater understanding about sepsis and sepsis care in Wales.

Recognition and management of sepsis

The main vehicle for change in [NHS Wales](#) has been the active participation of all Health Boards and Trusts in a dedicated network known as [RRAILS](#) – Rapid Response to Acute Illness Learning Set, led by the 1000 Lives improvement programme. The RRAILS steering group was formed in 2011 with the purpose of introducing the National Early Warning Score (NEWS), sepsis screening and implementation of the Sepsis 6 Care bundle.

Public Health Wales stated during the scrutiny session with the HSCS Committee in July 2018² that 80 per cent of people who attend hospital and become septic originate from primary and community care. GPs and other pre-hospital services present key opportunities for prompt recognition and treatment of sepsis. The [RRAILS](#) programme is being expanded to focus on early identification of sepsis in out-of-hospital settings including general practice, the Welsh ambulance service, community hospitals and care homes. During the HSCS Committee's scrutiny session, Public Health Wales suggested there is scope to build a greater understanding about early signs of deterioration from sepsis among nurses in care homes for example, and other staff in primary care/community settings.

Sepsis public awareness campaign

During a [short debate](#) in plenary on 18 April 2018, there were calls for a sepsis public awareness campaign in Wales. This was resisted by the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social

² National Assembly for Wales, Health Social Care and Sport Committee, [5 July 2018](#), para 138

Services, who stated there was currently a lack of evidence to suggest this would improve outcomes for patients.

During its scrutiny session with the HSCS Committee on [5 July 2018](#), Public Health Wales referred to England's 2016 sepsis awareness campaign, but suggested there was limited evidence about the campaign's effectiveness.

Correspondence on the petition

Correspondence from the Minister for Health and Social Services dated 15 February 2019 refers to Wales being seen as leading the way in the UK in making sepsis recognition and treatment a top priority within the NHS. The Minister highlights that in May 2016, NHS Wales gained recognition for its contribution to sepsis awareness by winning the Global Sepsis Award in the "Governments and Healthcare Authorities" category

In relation to national awareness campaigns, the Minister states that these are complex and that evidence of effectiveness is difficult to demonstrate. The Minister goes on to say:

I recognise the importance of raising public awareness of the dangers of sepsis but it is also important to strike the right balance with messages about the appropriate use of antibiotics and the risk of creating public anxiety.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.