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Mrs Janet Finch-Saunders AC/AM
Chair of the Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales

By email: SeneddPetitions@Assembly.Wales

Dear Mrs Finch Saunders,

Thank you for your letter dated 24th May, I apologise for the delay in responding.

You asked for the CHC's reflections on Hywel Dda Health Board's plans relating to Withybush A&E department. Please see our response below, and note that we have attached a copy of our commentary document that was submitted to the Health Board (and published by us) prior to their decision-making on a Clinical Strategy towards the end of 2018.

We heard from a wide range of people during the Health Board's public consultation. Understandably, many of the public in Pembrokeshire (as well as some areas in south Ceredigion and north Carmarthenshire) were worried that if changes to established A&E departments went ahead, in an emergency they could not be assessed and treated in a timely way.

In our letter of April 15th to the Petitions Committee relating to other proposed NHS changes in Hywel Dda, we said that

"the outcome of Health Board's public consultation showed a mismatch of expectation. Whilst many of the public who

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feared cuts to their services wanted more detail and concrete reassurances, the Health Board was looking to understand how the public viewed the strategic principles within proposals, with detail to be worked out in coming years.

The answer to addressing this mismatch will be continuous engagement with the public to help shape implementation, something that we have made very clear in our expectations and that the Health Board has agreed to. Further, it is possible that there will also be a need for further consultation on specific issues or change proposals as required.”

This outlook also applies to any changes to A&E departments. Ultimately whilst stating that change and improvement is important, after public consultation the CHC was unable to support or oppose proposals. It was felt a number of issues would need to be clarified before the CHC could agree or disagree that the changes were in the public's best interest.

As stated in our commentary document, one of the crucial questions would be the extent to which Welsh Ambulance Service Trust could meet demand within a new local system. We understand that work is underway to model and understand this. Additionally the CHC is working on a local and national level to understand key related issues such as the development of a Major Trauma Centre and network, the strengthening of the Emergency Medical Retrieval and Transfer Service, a potential new Hyper Acute Stroke Unit, stroke and acute cardiac pathways.

It would be important to scrutinise wider related areas of local NHS development in the future, which would impact on or support the operation of a new urgent care system. For example, agreement to fund a new hospital that would house a large new Emergency Department and Trauma Unit is a significant first step, with a much improved picture of health and social care capacity needed in community settings to avoid the hospital-focused congestion that ultimately adds more pressure to ambulance and A&E settings. The future of transport and accessibility (both issues

which the public raised repeatedly during consultation) remains unclear.

Fundamentally, the public must be given the opportunity to have their say as a clearer picture of future NHS urgent care emerges. Until this happens we would oppose any changes to the current configuration of A&E units in Hywel Dda, a principle we made clear in our commentary and one which was agreed with by the Health Board.

I trust this addresses the issue raised in your letter and if you feel that further elaboration is needed, please do not hesitate to make contact with me again.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Donna Coleman".

Donna Coleman
Chief Officer