

Briefing update:
General Medical Services Contracts held with Dr Allinson and Dr Ahmed

Background

The GP partnership of Dr Allinson and Dr Ahmed currently hold a number of General Medical Services (GMS) contracts within the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board Area, 5 of which were previously directly managed (MP) by the Health Board:

- Tredegar Health Centre (MP);
- Aberbeeg Medical Practice (MP);
- Brynmawr Medical Practice (MP);
- Bryntirion Surgery (including Markham Branch Surgery) (MP);
- Blaenavon Medical Practice (MP);
- Meddygfa Gelligaer Surgery;
- Pontypool Medical Centre; and
- Lliswerry Medical Practice.

The contracts for the afore mentioned practices are all standard NHS Wales GMS Contracts, with Dr Allinson and Dr Ahmed as the GP partnership to the contract. This is the same NHS GMS contract that is in place for all other GP partnerships across Aneurin Bevan University Health Board. GP partnerships provide care to their population as independent contractors to the NHS, this is the model that has been delivered since the inception of the NHS.

The GMS contracts have not been awarded to e-Harley Street Primary Care Solutions, but to the two individual GPs as a partnership. However, their way of working supports the delivery of some of the back-office functions via a central team employed by e-Harley Street Primary Care Solutions, with the aim being to enable the practice teams to focus on service delivery at a local level.

The GP partners joined the existing partnerships of Lliswerry Medical Practice and Meddygfa Gelligaer Surgery independent of the Health Boards involvement, in line with regulations. The GMS contracts for Tredegar Health Centre, Aberbeeg Medical Practice, Brynmawr Medical Practice, Bryntirion Surgery, Blaenavon Medical Practice and Pontypool Medical Centre were awarded following the Health Board Vacant Practice Process.

For the GMS contracts awarded through the Vacant Practice Process, a robust 'action plan' was followed with a series of transition meetings undertaken to support the incoming partnership and subsequent assurance meetings following hand over dates.

In August 2024, concerns were highlighted to the Health Board by local staff and explicit assurance was provided at the time by the Central Operations Manager on behalf of the partnership. Over recent weeks it has become apparent that a number of these issues are still ongoing, with an increasing number of locums coming forward regarding non-payment of invoices as well as ongoing concerns regarding payment of supplier invoices and HMRC/NHS Pension contributions.

As a result, the Health Board has instigated a period of enhanced monitoring for the GP partnership with bi-weekly meetings. The focus of these meetings is Governance, Workforce and Finance as well as any specific concerns. The first of these meetings was held on 28 October 2024.

We recognise, it is not for the Health Board to comment on employment issues at a local level and any such issues including in respect of locum pay and local staffing relationship have been directed back for the employers, Dr Ahmed and Dr Allinson, to address. However, we do acknowledge that we have a duty to ensure the contractors comply with proper processes

including the timely payment of providers to ensure there is no risk to the safe delivery of services for patients. As such, these issues have been raised during the assurance meetings.

Responses to concerns raised:

- **Lack of clinical cover**

This has particularly been raised as an issue for Brynmawr Medical Practice and resulted in an early closure of the practice on one occasion. The decision to close early was made by the local team, outside of usual external and internal processes and despite adequate cover arrangements being made by the central team. The relevant contractual process was implemented as a result and weekly monitoring of clinical provision has been instigated.

- **Failure to pay locum staff**

The Health Board has been contacted by a number of locums with regards to outstanding payments, the responsibility for which rests with the GP partnership. The Health Board has been working closely with Dr Allinson and Dr Ahmed to ensure that outstanding monies owed to the locum GPs who have been working for them are settled in a timely way. The Health Board is aware that they have reviewed their processes and a number of payments have been made, we will continue to work with the partnership to ensure that the outstanding payments are made in a timely manner. Dr Allinson and Dr Ahmed have also written directly to all locums who have been impacted.

- **Failure to pay suppliers**

The Health Board has been made aware of some outstanding invoices in relation to suppliers, which the GP partners are working to resolve. At this time, the Health Board is not aware of any suppliers that are currently withholding services.

- **Failure to have public liability insurance for practices**

The Welsh Risk Pool currently provides the means by which all Trusts and Health Authorities are able to fund their risk exposure for all risks such as employers and third-party liability, including that for clinical negligence. Brynmawr Medical Practice premise remains the responsibility of the Health Board until such time as the lease is re-assigned and is therefore made provision for under this scheme.

- **Concerns regarding the provision of Employer liability insurance**

Partnership has confirmed that this is in place.

- **Concerns in relation to pay staff, HMRC re: NIC and PAYE and NHS pension contribution payment**

New employers are able to make changes to arrangements for staff who have transferred under TUPE following a period of consultation. The partnership wished to align staff pay dates with the date they receive global sum payments from the Health Board, all staff were consulted with to this effect. The partners recognised that they tried to action this too quickly and extended the lead in time for this change to minimise any impact. All impacted staff members working across the practices were offered a bridging loan to support them through the transition week. Only a small number took this up, and generous re-payment terms have been agreed, dependent on individual requests, such as delayed payments until January 2025 and then re-payment over a 12-month period.

Dr Allinson and Dr Ahmed have advised that there was a delay in setting up EA codes and PAYE numbers however this has now been resolved with all relevant codes assigned. There are outstanding payments in relation to both sets of contributions and the Health Board has seen confirmation of established payment plans in respect of these.

- **Cleanliness of practice premises**

Dr Allinson and Dr Ahmed have advised that they have appointed new salaried cleaners across all of their practices, to replace previous contracts they held with external cleaning providers.

Current position

Practice Assurance Visits

In addition to the bi-weekly meetings through the enhanced monitoring arrangements, the Health Board is also undertaking a series of practice visits, across all of the practices where Dr Allinson and Dr Ahmed hold the GMS contract. Visits are being undertaken based on the General Medical Services Contract Assurance Framework, which is aligned to the Health and Care Quality Standards. The reviewing team, comprised of appropriate senior clinicians and contracting representatives, focus on specific areas of the assurance framework related to safe and effective clinical service delivery. To date, visits have been carried out at Brynmawr Medical Practice, Pontypool Medical centre and Meddygfa Gelligaer Surgery. There were no immediate or urgent safety concerns identified during the visits. An action plan has been produced for the practices where areas for ongoing improvement were identified, along with areas where further information or action was required from the practice. Brynmawr Medical Practice assurance visit report and action plan are included (Appendix 1a & 1b).

Feedback

Up until recent weeks, the number of patient concerns received by the Health Board across all of the practices for which Dr Allinson and Dr Ahmed are commissioned was in line with all other practices. There have been several social media posts which have encouraged the public to contact the Health Board to raise concerns, as a result there has been an increased number of concerns for Brynmawr in particular.

Practice		Total Number of Concerns since 1 April 2024	Themes
Brynmawr Practice	Medical	18 (17 between 29 Oct – 10 Dec) -9 MS-MP -7 Informal -2 PTR	Routine access General regarding service provision
Aberbeeg Practice	Medical	2 -1 MS-MP -1 PTR	Routine access
Tredegar Health Centre		3 MS-MP	One regarding a prescription query and two in respect of access
Blaenavon Practice	Medical	1 MS-MP	General regarding changes
Bryntirion Surgery		3 MS-MP	All three raised concerns regarding access
Meddygfa Gelligaer		0	-

Lliswerry Practice	Medical	0	-
Pontypool Centre	Medical	5 MS-MP	Routine access and general service concerns, including one regarding branch surgery opening hours which upon investigation remain unchanged from before transfer.

The Health Board has also received positive written feedback from patients regarding their experiences at Brynmawr Medical Practice via the MS-MP route.

A series of meetings have been held with local elected members in order to address concerns and provide assurances. An interim report was also prepared and shared with Town Councillors and Borough Councillors.

The Health Board is also liaising regularly with representatives from Llais and Welsh Government.

Sustainability Assessment Framework

The Sustainability Assessment Framework provides a consistent approach for assessing the sustainability of GP practices and determining the level of support required for those practices deemed to be at risk of significant service change or vulnerable to closure within the next 12 months. It is a scheme that is available to all GMS practices across Wales.

In order to maintain safe levels of clinical cover the Health Board has agreed financial support for locum reimbursement in line with the SAF for those practices for which Dr Allinson and Dr Ahmed are contractually responsible for and have a significant reliance on GP locums and subsequently qualify for the support.

Escalation Reporting

GMS practices are contractually required to report their escalation status against national triggers, via the Primary Care Information Portal (PCIP) on a monthly basis and/or when their levels change. The Health Board has a robust process in place to offer immediate support to practices reporting an increased escalation with additional resource provided through the Urgent Primary Care team as appropriate. This is available to all GMS practices in escalation at level 3 and above. Support through this route has been provided to Brynmawr Medical Practice, Aberbeeg Medical Practice, Tredegar Health Centre and Meddygfa Gelligaer in recent weeks.

Next Steps

The Health Board is continuing to work closely with Dr Allinson and Dr Ahmed to resolve all of the issues raised, balancing an appropriate level of support with the management of contractual compliance, whilst ensuring the needs of the registered population are met:

- The bi-weekly assurance meetings will continue. Outside of these formal meetings, senior colleagues within the Health Board are available for the partnership and management team should the need arise, to deal with any urgent specific issues.
- Continued monitoring of activity data under enhanced monitoring arrangements (appendix 2)
- Further assurance visits to be undertaken across the remaining practices.

- Support during periods of escalation levels, in line with national escalation reporting systems, will continue to be managed in line with the Health Board process.
- Brynmawr Medical Practice will continue to provide detail regarding the clinical provision throughout November 2024-January 2025.
- Partnership to provide a plan of when and how they expect to enter a period of greater stability, outlining unique challenges that the partnership are experiencing above challenges impacting on all GMS contractors.
- Follow-up meeting with elected members scheduled for end of January 2025.
- Executive Team lead working group established and meeting 11 December 2024.

Appendices

Appendix 1a	Appendix 1b	Appendix 2
<i>Brynmawr assurance report</i>	<i>Brynmawr response plan</i>	<i>Activity data</i>