

Channel 4 – NHS Wales Performance, with focus on diagnostics

Date and time	Friday 9 February 2024 09.30
Location and format	Pre-record Victoria Park Bandstand, Cardiff
Interviewer	Redacted – Section 40
Lead Press officer	Redacted – Section 40
Lead Official	Redacted – Section 40
Interview Topics	<p>The interview is looking at NHS Wales Performance over the last ten years, in particular increasing waiting times and failure to hit emergency care targets.</p> <p>They will also be focusing on the Diagnostic Target for Spring 2024 set in the Recovery Plan.</p> <p>It says we will increase the speed of diagnostic testing and reporting to eight weeks and 14 weeks for therapy interventions by Spring 2024.</p> <p>We are not on course to hit this target but we are making progress with extra investment in endoscopy.</p> <p>Channel 4 were filming yesterday at Endoscopy Theatre in Cwm Taf UHB</p>
Top Messages to get out	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We are making good progress in reducing long waiting times.• In 12-months we've almost halved the number of two-year waits and the average wait from time of referral to treatment is now 20 weeks.• Over the last 12 months the overall waiting list grew by 1.4% in Wales, compared with 5.9% in England; record numbers of people are starting cancer treatment or being given the good news they don't have cancer.• 49% increase in cancer referrals over three years is putting pressure on our diagnostic system but we are investing to increase capacity, in particular in endoscopy.

NHS Wales Demand

- Wales has the highest proportion of people aged over 65 in the UK and the NHS is supporting more people with multiple chronic conditions in the community. 21.4% of the population is aged 65 or older. At the UK level, it's 18.7%
- Every month, NHS Wales has around 2m contacts with the public in a population of 3.1m people – this does not include calls to 111 or contact with mental health and maternity services or diagnostic tests.
- Over the last decade, demand for NHS care – both planned and emergency – has increased markedly.
- There were more than 1.4m referrals for new outpatient appointments in 2022-23, 31% more than a decade ago.
- The number of referrals into secondary care has increased by over 10% over the last year. Despite this, the total list size has only increased by 1.4%. In the same period, the total list size in England has increased by 5.9%.
- As a result of actions taken to respond to the pandemic, waiting times for planned treatment have increased, as has the overall waiting list.
- From February 2020 to November 2023, there has been a 64% increase in waiting lists in Wales compared to a 66% increase in England.
- Ambulance - 175 red calls a day in December 2023 – 31st month in a row 100+ red calls a day and 2nd highest on record.

Reducing the backlog

- I launched the Planned Care Recovery Plan in April 2022 with a number of targets set to be achieved by the end of the current Senedd term.
- The plan was supported by an extra £170 million annually for the remainder of the Senedd term.
- In Wales unlike in England we include people waiting for diagnostic and therapy treatment which makes up a significant proportion of the numbers.
- In England more people can afford to go private so reducing numbers on the waiting list. In February last year [ONS](#) estimated that among people currently on an NHS waiting list, 2% in Wales had paid for a private medical appointment, test or treatment in the past month because they felt the NHS wait was too long, and it was 6% in England.

- We have placed a clear focus on tackling both those patients with an urgent need and those that have waited the longest.
- Thanks to the hard work of our fantastic NHS staff, we are making good progress in reducing long waiting times.
- In 12-months we've almost halved the number of two-year waits and the average wait from time of referral to treatment is now 20 weeks.
- Over the last 12 months the overall waiting list grew by 1.4% in Wales, compared with 5.9% in England; record numbers of people are starting cancer treatment or being given the good news they don't have cancer.
- In the most recent data for Wales the overall number of people on waiting lists has come down.

Cancer

- Cancer performance is not where we, the health boards nor the public want it to be.
- We have seen a record increase in referrals for cancer diagnosis, 49% in three years.
- Health boards have also been delivering increased activity, with October 2023 seeing the second highest number of patients starting treatment in a single month, and November 2023 was the fourth highest.
- All health boards have reported that breast, gynaecology, lower/upper GI, and urology services continue to be under significant pressure. Over the last few months there has also been an increase in skin referrals.
- Additional waiting list initiatives, weekend working, moving staff and patients around where necessary to alleviate some of these pressures have been introduced by health boards.
- A detailed and intensive national cancer intervention is in place delivered by with an initial focus on urology, lower gastrointestinal and gynaecological cancers. This is looking at all stages of the pathway including diagnostics, demand and capacity, planning and modelling.
- In December 2023, I approved £2m, for three consecutive years, to recover cancer waiting times for those cancer types with the most challenged cancer performance: lower gastrointestinal, gynaecological, and urological cancers.

Emergency Care Performance

- We have invested in new ways for people to access emergency and urgent care services – so they don't have to go to an emergency department.
- These include 16 new primary care centres, which are treating 12,000 people a month and 23 new same day emergency care services, seeing around 5,000 patients a month.

- Our new national 111 service, which is providing advice to more than 75,000 people each month, including around 525 people who need urgent mental healthcare.
- Performance in Welsh major A&E departments has been better than England in 13 of the last 16 months.
- 4hr performance in December was 3.2 percentage points higher than December 2022.
- There was a 20% fall in the numbers of patients waiting for 12 hours in Emergency Departments compared to the same time the previous year.

Ambulances

- Ambulance - 175 red calls a day in December 2023 – 31st month in a row 100+ red calls a day and 2nd highest on record.
- When compared to the same time last year we've seen improvements in ambulance response time performance despite the highest demand for red calls on record, in December.
- The median response time for immediately life-threatening 'red' calls was just over 8 minutes, and 80% of red calls received a response within fifteen minutes.
- The Welsh Ambulance Service NHS Trust also responded to the highest number of calls on record within 8 minutes in December.
- Last year we invested £3m in additional ambulance staff, which has enabled an extra 76 whole-time-equivalent staff to be recruited ahead of this winter.

Diagnostic Waits

Current Position

- In our Planned Care recovery plan we have said we will increase the speed of diagnostic testing and reporting to eight weeks and 14 weeks for therapy interventions by Spring 2024.
- We have seen a record increase in referrals for cancer diagnosis (up 53% over three years) and this has resulted in some capacity being switched to manage the increase in demand for, these patients are seen ahead of planned non-emergency treatments and as a result less capacity is available for the routine diagnostic demand.
- *The data shows we are not on course to hit this target*
 - Diagnostic waits over 8 weeks have increased 10% in the latest year and 5% since the recovery plan was published in April 2022. There are currently 47,200 diagnostics waiting over 8 weeks.
 - Endoscopy waits over 8 weeks are down 1% in the latest year and down 11% since April 2022. At a health board level, there's quite a range. Since

April 2022 there have been reductions in Betsi (-25%), Swansea bay (-22%), CTM (-47%) and AB (-46%), but increases in HD (+16%) and Cardiff (+156%).

- For therapies over 14 weeks, there's been a 20% increase in the latest year, but they've fallen 12% since April 2022. There are currently 11,500 therapies waiting over 14 weeks.

What we are doing

- As part of the National Planned Care Transformation and Recovery Plan the NHS in Wales has a clear diagnostic strategy which aims to deliver improvements in waiting times and access to diagnostic tests.
- We are increasing capacity for diagnostic test and have seen some improvements in waiting times.
- We've invested £15m through the National Endoscopy Programme £15m in new facilities and workforce to improve access to endoscopy.
- Four new theatres have been recently opened in Aneurin Bevan Health Board, another 6 are due to open in Cardiff and Vale and there are plans for a Regional Diagnostic Hub in SE Wales to further increase capacity.

Hospitals

- Wales has considerably more hospital beds than England relative to the size of the population.
- Latest figures show that the Welsh health service has around 280 General and acute hospital beds (not including maternity, mental health or learning disabilities), for every 100,000 people. This compares to 183 in England.
- Wales is building six times the number of "new hospitals" compared to England if we use the same definition as the UK Government use for a new hospital.
- They said they were going to build 40 'new hospitals' between 2019 and 2030. If we use the same criteria for Wales, we get 14 'new hospitals' in Wales

Primary Care

- Wales has proportionately more GPs than England per head of population.
- In Wales we have already changed the GP contract to eliminate the 8am rush.
- As part of the commitment, the release of all appointments at 8 am, or other narrow window of time, is no longer acceptable. Patients can expect to have their needs met at first point of contact without the need to contact the

practice on multiple occasions.

- There are 60% more English residents registered with GPs in Wales than the other way around. And it's been increasing in recent years.

Jan 2023:

- 13,488 patients resident in Wales and registered to GPs in England
- 21,391 patients resident in England and registered to GPs in Wales

Jan 2020

- 13,705 patients resident in Wales and registered to GPs in England
 - 20,807 patients resident in England and registered to GPs in Wales
- We have changed the dental contract so in the last two years 300,000 new NHS dental patients have had treatment.
 - Wales is further ahead in journey to reform eye health care, than in England. We have changed the ophthalmology contract so people can have their eye care in the community.

Pharmacy

- A new Clinical Community Pharmacy Service (CCPS), providing access to treatment and advice for common ailments, contraception, seasonal influenza vaccination, and supplies of repeat prescriptions in an emergency is now available in more than 99% of pharmacies.
- More than half a million consultations took place across all CCPS services in the first year following its launch. This included nearly 240,000 consultations for a range of common ailments such as sore throats, allergic reactions and back pain - an increase of 73.9% on the year before and more than a fivefold increase from five years ago.
- Almost 80% of people who visited a pharmacy and used the CCPS reported they would have visited a GP or out of hours service if it was not available, freeing up over 400,000 appointments for others to see their GP.
- In addition, as a result of contract reform Wales became the first UK country to introduce a nationally directed community pharmacist prescribing service; pharmacists who are trained to prescribe can now treat a range of ailments which would otherwise be treated by GPs or in other NHS services.

Access to new medicines

- People in Wales have better and faster access to new, NICE-approved treatments than people in England, thanks to the Welsh Government's flagship New Treatment Fund. The £16m-a-year fund has improved access to new treatments for all conditions not just cancer – on average they are available just 13 days after approval.
- The Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry published its report *Transforming lives, improving health outcomes* which shows uptake of NICE approved medicines in Wales is the higher than all regions in England, included in their analysis, and singles out the Welsh Government's New Treatment Fund as an example of best practice in ensuring prompt equitable access to innovative medicines.