Yr Grŵp Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Health, Social Care and Early Years Group

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

NHS Wales Chief Executive Officers
NHS Wales Chief Operating Officers
NHS Medical Directors

Ein Cyf/Our Ref: WHC/2026/035

23rd November 2026

Dear Colleague

WHC/2026/035: Welsh Health Circular in respect of implementation of the NHS Wales Theatre Charter

Reducing waiting times and improving access to planned care remains a key priority for NHS Wales. Whilst significant progress has been made in increasing activity and recovering services, it is clear that achieving sustainable improvements in access will require us to maximise the value obtained from existing resources, particularly operating theatre capacity.

Operating theatre capacity is one of the most valuable and constrained resources within NHS Wales. Variation in theatre utilisation, avoidable cancellations, delayed starts and inefficiencies within surgical pathways can reduce the number of patients treated and impact patient experience and outcomes. The NHS Wales Theatre Charter has therefore been developed to establish a consistent, evidence-based approach to theatre planning, preparation and delivery across Wales.

The Charter brings together nationally agreed standards, best practice and the principles of the Elective Optimisation Programme to support the effective management of the entire surgical pathway, from referral and decision to treat through to theatre delivery, discharge planning and continuous improvement. It provides a clear framework for improving productivity, reducing unwarranted variation and strengthening accountability for theatre performance.

This Welsh Health Circular requires all NHS health boards and trusts providing theatre services to formally adopt and implement the NHS Wales Theatre Charter and embed its principles within local theatre management arrangements. Organisations should ensure that local policies, procedures and operational standards align with the requirements of the Charter and that appropriate governance arrangements are in place to oversee implementation and ongoing compliance.

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

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Implementation should include active engagement of clinical, operational and administrative teams; routine review of theatre utilisation and performance metrics; use of the national theatre optimisation dashboard; and systematic review of cancellations, delays and unused capacity to support continuous improvement. Health boards should undertake a baseline assessment against the Charter standards and put in place local implementation plans to address any identified gaps. Progress should be monitored through established governance arrangements.

Successful implementation of the Charter will support organisations to improve access to planned care, reduce avoidable cancellations, improve patient experience, increase theatre productivity and make the best use of available NHS resources. Most importantly, it will help ensure that patients receive the right treatment, in the right place, at the right time.

I would ask all health boards and trusts to ensure that the necessary actions are taken to implement the Charter and embed its standards within local arrangements.

Yours sincerely



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