



Palliative Care

Introduction

The traditional view has been that palliative care and hospice services only apply to those who are dying, but it has become increasingly evident that palliative care is often needed from the time of diagnosis, whether or not the disease will be responsive to curative treatment.

Palliative care cuts across all specialities, being provided in various settings including a hospital, hospice, private setting and at home. The voluntary sector has a tradition of providing palliative care services and many services in Wales have developed through voluntary sector funding in partnership with the NHS. Care is provided in a number of ways to patients and their families. Some hospices have in-patient beds while others provide hospice services in the patient's home. Some concentrate on respite care while others focus on long-term provision. Whilst many terminally ill patients would prefer to die at home, most fail to achieve it, with three quarters of people dying in hospitals or hospices.

The Assembly Government's overarching strategic document for palliative care was published in February 2003. Two further policy developments have been the publication of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidance on improving supportive and palliative care for patients with cancer in 2004 and the publication of the Assembly Government's updated National Cancer Standards which include standards for specialist palliative care.

The commissioning of palliative care services is a matter for the Local Health Boards (LHBs) working through the 3 Cancer Networks. In 2003, a 'one off' fund of £10 million was made available to the voluntary sector over four years to support and develop palliative care services and was accompanied by a specific requirement that hospices engage fully with their LHBs, through the Cancer Networks, to assess future service need and to establish sustainable funding arrangements. In December 2006, it was announced that £2 million of recurrent funding would be made available to hospices in Wales. The allocation of the £2 million is to be decided following a baseline review of palliative care services.

Palliative care services vary across Wales and have developed in an ad hoc way, often responding to local demand and fund raising efforts. Funding has always been an issue within the palliative care sector and there are differences in the ways in which hospices are funded across the UK, e.g. the Department of Health has a target that, by 2008, 50 per cent of the core funding of hospices in England will come from the UK Government. Evidence submitted to the Health and Social Services Committee policy review into cancer services indicates that there are issues and tensions between the NHS and the voluntary sector about commissioning and funding services; that provision is patchy across Wales and that hospice services save the NHS considerable money, but are not adequately recompensed.

According to a report on independent hospices from the Welsh Consumer Council in July 2005,ⁱ there are 51 palliative care providers in Wales comprising both NHS and voluntary hospices. Operating across Wales, they provide, between them, 109 care services for people with terminal illness in all 22 local authorities. Thirteen of the 51 palliative care providers based in Wales are independent, locally managed charitable hospices. These provide 27 per cent of the total palliative care in Wales. There are 11 adult hospices and 2 children's hospices. The Welsh Consumer Council also state that:

- Amongst inpatient units, a third are provided by independent hospices in Wales - compared to three quarters in England;
- Less than half of inpatient beds in Wales are provided by independent hospices - compared to 81 per cent in England.

Overview of current statutory powers of the Assembly

"Health and Health Services" is Field 9 of the *Government of Wales Act 2006*. The Assembly could, in accordance with the *Government of Wales Act 2006*, pursue an Order in Council seeking Measure-making powers to enable it to legislate in relation to specific matters connected with palliative care.

Forthcoming EU and UK primary legislation

Baroness Finlay of Llandaff introduced a Private Members' Bill on *Palliative Care* in the House of Lords on 16 November 2006, which seeks to make provision for palliative care for people who are suffering from a terminal illness.

Key Welsh Government documents and action plans from the Second Assembly:

- The strategic direction for palliative care was set out by the Assembly Government in 2003.ⁱⁱ
- The Welsh Health Circular, *All Wales Care Pathway for the Last Days of Life*, highlights the importance of the continuation of patient care through to the very end of life, irrespective of physical or mental health conditions.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Palliative care was one of the key areas explored in the Health and Social Services Committee review of cancer services in Wales.^{iv}
- There are Welsh National Standards for Specialist Palliative Care Cancer Services, published in 2005.^v

Legacy issues from the Second Assembly

- The Health and Social Services Committee's legacy paper highlighted the capacity of the NHS and its partners to meet the physical and mental health needs of the population as a high level strategic issue for the attention of the Third Assembly.
- The Committee's *Review of Cancer Services for the People of Wales* (2007) made specific recommendations relating to palliative care, for example, that funding be put on a stable footing that reflects more equitably the extent to which the sector provides services that would otherwise fall to the NHS. The Committee also recommended that, as a minimum, a Committee of the Third Assembly should scrutinise the Welsh Assembly Government on its response to the Review.
- A review of baseline service review of palliative care is being undertaken across Wales to establish current and future need and the gaps in provision and funding streams. The Assembly Government announced that £2 million would be made available recurrently from 2007-08 for high quality hospice services. Decisions on how this funding will be allocated are to be informed by the recommendations of the baseline service review, which was due to report at the end of April 2007.

Useful Links

- Help the Hospices:
<http://www.helpthehospices.org.uk/>
- Marie Curie Cancer Care:
<http://campaign.mariecurie.org.uk/Wales/>
- National Council for Palliative Care:
http://www.ncpc.org.uk/who_we_are/regions_wales.html

Further information

For further information on any aspect of Palliative Care, please contact Kathryn Potter, Members' Research Service (Kathryn.potter@wales.gsi.gov.uk), 029 2089 8038

ⁱ Welsh Consumer Council (July 2005) *Independent Hospices in Wales: A Consumer Perspective* <http://www.wales-consumer.org.uk/Research%20and%20policy/pdfs/Independent%20Hospices%20in%20Wales%20-%20Welsh%20Consumer%20Council.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Welsh Assembly Government, *A Strategic Direction for Palliative Care Services in Wales*, February 2003, <http://new.wales.gov.uk/docrepos/40382/dhss/510356/pall-care-final-e.pdf?lang=en>

ⁱⁱⁱ Welsh Health Circular WHC (2006) 030, *End of Life Care - All Wales Care Pathway for the Last Days of Life*, June 2006, <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sites3/Documents/362/WHC%5F2006%5F030%2DEnglish%2Epdf>

^{iv} National Assembly for Wales, Health and Social Services Committee, *Cancer Services for the People of Wales*, Policy Review, February 2007, <http://www.wales.gov.uk/keypubassemhealsocsvs/content/cancer-services-e.htm>

^v Welsh Assembly Government, *National Standards for Specialist Palliative Care Cancer Services*, 2005 <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sites3/documents/362/ACF1163.pdf>