



Our ref: WQ84160

Mabon ap Gwynfor MS
Senedd Constituency Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd

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27 January 2022

Dear Mabon,

Thank you for your recent Written Question (following the Cervical Screening Wales statement on extending the normal screening gap from three to five years - if the human papilloma virus is not detected in a smear test) asking how the Welsh Government ensures that women's health needs do not become less of a priority at a time when the health service is under pressure?

Like the rest of the UK, the Welsh Government follows the independent, expert advice of the UK National Screening Committee (UK NSC). The UK NSC made a recommendation in 2019 for all UK nations to implement the new cervical screening test and change the screening interval from three to five years for those who are HPV negative. This recommendation was made after years of research and UK wide public consultation.

The change to the cervical screening interval has been made to benefit women and people with a cervix. Screening every five years with HPV testing offers at least as good protection as the old test being offered every three years and enables the screening programme to target services to those most at risk of cervical cancer. People attending for their smear for the next three years will see no change. The interval change will start to take effect in January 2025 when people who have had a negative HPV result at their next screening will be asked to attend for their subsequent screening in 2027, instead of in 2025.

In relation to your wider point about women's health, Covid-19 has placed unprecedented challenges upon the NHS both in Wales and the UK more broadly. Like many services across our health system, gynaecology provision has faced substantial disruption. Guidance has been developed and issued to support health boards reintroducing services that have been delayed as a consequence of Covid-19.

It is critical that clinicians working in gynaecology services undertake a review of their waiting lists and put in place appropriate actions that reprioritise patients, some who might be waiting months or even years, and offer suitable arrangements to reduce the number of women waiting for gynaecological investigation or treatment. It is important that women on gynaecology waiting lists throughout Wales are receiving the best communication and

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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.

support they can while awaiting care. As a minimum this should include advice, tailored to the individual, regarding pain and symptom management, and options for other potential treatments that could be trialled while awaiting surgery.

The Women's Health Implementation Group (WHIG) was set up in March 2018 as a ministerially-directed group to consider reports into the use of synthetic tape and mesh sheets for stress urinary incontinence and pelvic organ prolapse, endometriosis and fecal incontinence. Since its establishment, WHIG has been allocated £1m a year to establish a network of pelvic health and wellbeing coordinators in each health board and to play a vital role in addressing the interlinking issues across areas of women's pelvic health. More recently it has also allowed for the recruitment of a network of specialist endometriosis nurses in each health board to develop national pathways to help to reduce diagnostic times across Wales.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. E. Morgan'.

Eluned Morgan AS/MS

Y Gweinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Minister for Health and Social Services