



Ein cyf/Our ref OQ56018

Rhun Ap Iorwerth MS
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

21 December 2020

Dear Rhun,

I am writing further to proceedings during First Minister's Questions on 8 December and in response to the First Minister's undertaking to ask me to provide some further information regarding access to NHS dentistry in North Wales. I have included a link to the [Plenary Transcript](#) (see bullet point 50). A copy of this letter will also be shared with the Members Library Service:

North Wales Practice Closures

When a dental practice decides to reduce or end the provision of NHS services the funding for the lost provision remains with the Health Board in order for it to replace the level of NHS dental services. Health Boards have the responsibility and budget for the provision of dental services to meet local needs and the wider oral health agenda. This gives them the ability to fund and develop services to reflect local requirements and priorities.

Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board are working to replace the lost provision as a matter of urgency and to have interim measures in place to maintain the continuity of care for those patients who may lose access following the practice closure. I understand that in the short term the Health Board will aim to increase the availability of access to urgent and priority dental care for patients who find themselves without access to a regular dentist.

The Health Board also plans to re-commission replacement dental services in the area as soon as possible and will be identifying local practices with the capacity to increase the provision of routine dental services.

Anyone seeking access to NHS dental services should contact Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCU.Info@wales.nhs.uk) for the latest information and for details of the Health Board's plans to replace the lost provision. The Health Board will be able to provide details of the current level and location of available NHS dental services in the locality; and can also provide information about the access sessions and availability of urgent treatment the Health Board provides for those residents not currently placed with a practice.

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

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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.

Specialist Services at Ysbyty Gwynedd

Regarding access to specialist dentistry services at Ysbyty Gwynedd, the Health Board has commented that management at Ysbyty Gwynedd is aware of its duty of care to clinical staff as well as patients. In this instance, the orthodontic consultant has been shielding. During this period, management have worked with colleagues in the central service at Ysbyty Glan Clwyd to ensure that urgent patients have been supported when required.

The Health Board also says it was not possible to secure a locum during the first wave of Covid-19 but work has recommenced to support recruitment of a NHS locum. Recruitment in the field remains extremely challenging. Following a recent risk assessment the substantive orthodontic consultant has confirmed that they are able to return to patient facing duties. It is expected that they will recommence duties this month. The Health Board have said no dental services have been transferred from Ysbyty Gwynedd and there is no intention to downgrade the orthodontic service.

Dental Teaching Unit

Welsh Government are working with the Health Board on the establishment of a Dental Teaching Unit (DTU) in Bangor and, in tandem with the re-commissioning plans, to incorporate a hub and spoke model to service Caernarfon and Colwyn Bay. This is an opportunity for the Health Board to significantly increase access to primary care dentistry in North Wales and provide services which are aligned to Welsh Government dental reform principles. The DTU will increase the area's attractiveness to recruit and retain dental clinicians looking to develop their careers. The precise site of the DTU is yet to be decided but location and easy access to and from public transport needs to be a key consideration. The Health Board will be able to provide further details as the project develops.

Workforce

Some dental practices are experiencing difficulties with recruitment and retention of dentists, and this is impacting on the provision of NHS dental services. Welsh Government continue to discuss with Health Boards how to address these issues, including incentives and greater use of skill mix. Health Education and Improvement Wales are looking at the commissioning of training numbers, training and education packages to help develop the workforce; and considering whether there are more effective workforce models to deliver services which could improve dentists' workloads and make practices more sustainable.

Regular meetings are held with Cardiff University on the number of dental undergraduates and Dental Care Professional trainees. Numbers for dental undergraduates remain at 70-80 per year and we have increased the training places for dental hygienists and therapists by 41% in recognition of the changes required to the skill mix within dental workforce teams to deliver care in the longer term.

The complexities that affect the dental workforce such as changes in working patterns and increased specialisation is acknowledged. Our ongoing dental reform programme has highlighted the advantages of a well-balanced dental team delivering preventive-based approaches in general dental services. As part of the reform programme we are working with practices to improve access, experience and quality of dental care. Significant changes are being made which have been welcomed by dental teams with currently 40% of all practices part of the reform programme. We are looking to identify and establish innovative opportunities to upskill and improve career pathways in dentistry and to ensure development of the dental workforce is aligned to the stated ambitions and themes within the Workforce Strategy for Health and Social Care 2020.

All-Wales Faculty for Dental Care Professionals (DCPs)

(The term DCP includes dental nurse, dental technician, dental therapist, and dental hygienist)

Welsh Government, working with Bangor University, have established an all-Wales Faculty of Dental Care Professionals (DCP) which is working with education colleges and training providers to set clear educational frameworks and monitor the quality of training. It will develop research capability, leadership and enhance the skills of DCPs to help fulfil their potential. The Faculty's work plan includes the co-production of a framework for the future DCP workforce in Wales.

The Faculty provides a platform to enrich the training environment and the capability, well-being and engagement of the DCP workforce across Wales. The team have already developed on-line courses which offer affordable and flexible ways to learn new skills and advance careers (in addition to developing the level 4 and 3 Dental Nurse courses) and open up training development opportunities for DCPs in dental practice.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vaughan Gething". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Vaughan Gething AS/MS

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