



22 July 2020

Dear Dr Dai Lloyd MS,

COVID-19: Evidence session with the Minister and Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services and the Director General for Health and Social Services and the NHS Wales Chief Executive

The Royal College of General Practitioners Cymru Wales, would like to provide an observation on a comment made at one of the HSCS Committee's recent meetings. During the HSCS Committee Meeting on 16 July 2020 Dr Andrew Goodall said:

"we've seen a drop of about 30 – 35% in GP attendance and activity which has still stayed at about that level over these recent weeks".

While we fully appreciate that Dr Goodall was not seeking to be critical of general practice, indeed he was fulsome in his praise for all health workers during the Committee session, it is the view of the Royal College of GPs that this specific quote is not reflective of the experience of our members.

GPs' current workload

As has been widely acknowledged, including in the College's submission to this Committee, there was an initial drop off in the number of patients contacting their GP at the start of the COVID-19 outbreak in Wales. However, this is no longer the case. Through the active work of the profession, NHS Wales and Welsh Government, a concerted effort was made to emphasise that while the format of the consultation may be different to that pre-pandemic, surgeries were open, and GPs were on hand to help patients. Senior officers at RCGP Wales engaged with broadcast and print media to explain that general practice was still very much 'open for business'. This was a message also conveyed during the Committee's evidence session with RCGP Wales. The current attendance, both virtual and in person, at GP surgeries is high. There is a logical explanation for this. The workload one might typically expect at this time has been supplemented by those patients who were reluctant to contact their GP earlier in the pandemic and those who have conditions which have been accentuated by the pandemic and lockdown measures. It should also be noted that in person consultations now require additional time due to PPE protection. It is also the case that virtual consultations can often take a little longer than traditional in person consultations. It is undoubtedly a very busy period for GPs across Wales

and we anticipate the long-term effects of COVID-19 will result in a prolonged increase in GP workload.

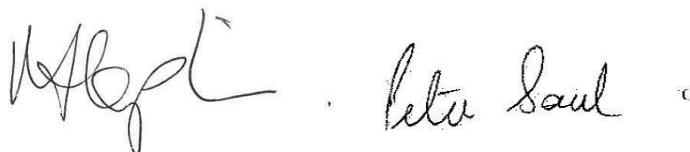
Availability of Data

We appreciate that Dr Goodall was basing his assertion on collated data which he has subsequently offered to share with us. However, we do not feel that data producing an output which is so skewed in comparison to the experience of our members can be regarded as providing a full perspective on the current position. On this point, it is our belief that RCGP has a role to play in helping to provide a more accurate picture.

The RCGP Research and Surveillance Centre (RSC) is an internationally renowned source of information, analysis and interpretation of primary care data. Established in 1957, the RSC is an active research and surveillance unit that collects and monitors data, in particular influenza, from over 500 practices. However, at present there is a problem in the Centre accessing data from Wales. This matter has been raised with Dr Goodall and we are encouraged by his keenness to help find a solution so that information from Welsh general practice can also be processed via the Centre to provide us all with an improved indication as to work being undertaken in general practice.

In conclusion, it is our hope that this letter has brought clarity to the current and anticipated workload in general practice. We are grateful for the pro-active way in which Dr Goodall has engaged with the College following concern about the comment from the meeting and look forward to working closely with him to help provide the most accurate possible picture of workload in general practice in Wales.

Yours sincerely



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Joint Chair
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Prof Peter Saul
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cc.
Vaughan Gething MS
Dr Andrew Goodall