



15 November 2021

Dear Auditor General,

Taking Care of the Carers? How NHS bodies supported staff wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

I am pleased to respond on behalf of Welsh Government to your report published 28 October 2021 *Taking Care of the Carers*.

I welcome your acknowledgement of the investment that Welsh Government and NHS Bodies made quickly in response to the demands on our NHS workforce health and wellbeing during the pandemic. I fully accept the recommendations that you have made to Welsh Government. I also note the checklist that you have provided to NHS Board Members to obtain assurance of their support wellbeing arrangements aligned to your recommendations to NHS bodies from your report.

In terms of the recommendations to Welsh Government, I will respond fully with detail of how we plan to address the considerations made in the report.



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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.

Recommendation 7: Evaluating the national staff wellbeing offer

As noted in your report, in April 2020, the Workforce Health and Wellbeing Sub-group was established, as a Sub-group of the Covid-19 Workforce Deployment and Wellbeing Planning Response Group (Workforce Cell). The partnership working approach to build on the Health and Wellbeing Network and HEIW resources already developed to support staff health and wellbeing, enabled strong assurance of the health and wellbeing planning being undertaken across organisations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Health and Wellbeing Sub-group also acted as an expert forum for the identification of appropriate and informed courses of action based on workforce intelligence from several sources.

The membership of the Sub-group included representation from NHS Wales, HEIW, Welsh Government, Trade Union and Social Care.

The Sub-group quickly identified areas which merited investment and recommended evidence based and validated tools that would underpin local NHS employer health and wellbeing resources namely:

- Extension of the existing Health for Health Professionals (HHP) service to include all healthcare professionals
- Dedicated Samaritans helpline for the NHS and Social Care workforce
- All-Wales Workforce Wellbeing Conversation Guide for health and social care

All three interventions were taken forward and investment made by Welsh Government. Health and wellbeing is complex and multi-factorial and, as such, the effectiveness and impact of specific interventions are difficult to evaluate. Nevertheless, data and user evaluation have provided useful metrics and data analysis as evaluation of performance, user experience and service impact were built into all three all-Wales resources.

For example, the HHP service routinely collects core outcome measures to facilitate evaluation of its effectiveness and inform future development to improve the quality of the service provided. Building on previous work, HHP Wales has refined its core outcome measures to cover the three clusters identified in the Wales framework for the routine use of outcome tools in mental health and learning disability services. All clients who make contact with HHP Wales are asked to complete outcome measures according to which arm of the service they use. The results of these are analysed and used to facilitate learning and

quality improvement. In addition to quantitative data, clients will be encouraged to provide written feedback on the service which feeds into a continuous improvement cycle. HHP Wales also provide statistical information to Welsh Government as part of routine performance monitoring meetings. We are currently tendering for a new Mental Health Service for the NHS and Social Care Workforce in Wales to start April 2022, and impact evaluation is built into this service specification.

The Samaritans helpline for NHS and Social care contract mandated weekly performance reports and Welsh Government received an annual report in August 2021. Fully recognising the need for continued support, an extension to the Samaritans helpline contract was agreed and funding agreed until August 2022. A requirement for evaluation and analysis was built into the extension contract. Developed in partnership, evaluation has been built into the Wellbeing Conversation Guide which will be reviewed to support the iterative approach agreed.

We accept this recommendation and are committed to working in partnership with colleagues in NHS organisations to ensure that our investment on a national level continues to complement local support and resources as we move through the next stages of the pandemic and that any gaps in provision are identified. The national Health and Wellbeing Network, has evolved from the COVID-19 Health and Wellbeing Sub-group to include representation from the Social Care Wales Health and Wellbeing group. The network continues to provide oversight and guidance and we will ensure their expertise is used to evaluate the impact of interventions against robust criteria to ensure appropriateness and value for money and identify emerging gaps in provision. As this mechanism is already established we would like your agreement that this recommendation is considered complete and the effectiveness of this mechanism could be followed up as necessary by a future audit study.

Recommendation 8: Evaluating the All-Wales COVID-19 Workforce Risk Assessment Tool

We accept this recommendation and our response below sets out the ways that evaluation was built into the development of the Risk Assessment Tool as it was developed and plans for a the publication of a lessons learned report which includes the Risk Assessment Tool.

We welcome your acknowledgement of the achievement in the design and provision of the evidence-based Risk Assessment Tool for the NHS workforce and the wider public sector.

A report summarising lessons learnt will be published imminently from the First Minister's Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic COVID-19 Advisory Group including the work of the Risk Assessment subgroup who were responsible for the development of the Risk Assessment Tool. The Tool was designed and delivered at pace, to minimise risk to the workforce and the wider public as soon as possible. Despite this, monitoring and evaluation was built into the methodology and guiding principles of the production and roll out of the Tool, and was a key consideration as detailed in the terms of reference of the subgroup.

Data collection and analysis was built into the fabric of the online tool to ensure that evaluation was an ongoing process and that the Risk Assessment subgroup could receive regular data analysis reports to ensure the Tool was fit for purpose. Data included tool completion rates including breakdown by sector, ethnicity, age and risk rating. This monitored progress and allowed the group to make responsive adaptations to both the Tool itself and engagement around the Tool.

The development of the tool was undertaken in partnership, and frequent feedback from key partners including trade union, health board and NHS Employers colleagues was critical. Additionally a mailbox was created for anyone to contact us directly about the Risk Tool. This mailbox continues to receive correspondence and to date we have replied to 311 individuals giving advice and clarification on a range of issues and noting where improvement is required for the next version of the Tool.

The first version of the Tool was made available 26 May 2020 and targeted directly at health and social care workers. Several social media campaigns were launched to target health and social care workers and were deemed to successfully do this. Encouraging levels of awareness were found in the CIW Questback survey which asked three questions about the Risk Tool. Awareness was found to increase over time and by July 2020 80% of care service providers (care homes and domiciliary support) were aware of the tool. Most also reported that managing staff in high risk groups was relatively easy since this involved a small number of staff.

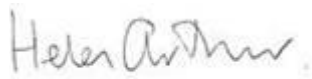
In July 2020 an independent evaluation was conducted to collate feedback from stakeholders and analyse initial data from the Tool. The evaluation found that the Tool was well received by employees who were glad to have it. Several suggestions for improvement were raised which were recognised by the sub-group and addressed at pace to ensure issues were resolved.

The evaluation also supported our understanding of how the Tool was being used and how the completion of the Tool influenced working practices. Those who specifically scored high/very high reported they were more likely to have experienced a change in working practices as a result of completing the risk assessment tool. Over half reported the tool being easy/simple/straightforward to complete, with just under a quarter finding it OK/Good/Fine for all formats. This feedback was considered by the Risk Assessment group and the Welsh Government, and adaptations were made accordingly.

To date there have been seven versions of the Tool. The Tool is a live resource and is subject to ongoing review as the evidence base builds and we learn from implementation. All emerging evidence about Covid-19 impact and practical implications of implementing the tool will continue to be reviewed by the Risk Assessment Subgroup

We have described the process for evaluation of the Tool during its development and the process for the publication of a lessons learned report. We will incorporate the lessons from this report into our ongoing development of the Tool. We would, therefore, like to agree that this action is considered to be complete once the Lessons Learned Report is published with the effectiveness of this mechanism could be followed up as necessary by a future audit study.

Yours sincerely



Helen Arthur

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Cyfarwyddwr y Gweithlu a Busnes Corfforaethol