

P-06-1227 To get a specialist mental health mother and baby unit in North Wales, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 04.04.22

Dear Committee,

It is good to hear that the Welsh Health Specialised Services are working on new Mother and baby unit to cover North Wales, and for beds available for Welsh women who have been affected by serious postnatal mental illness like I have can access. However this means that the location is not going to be in North Wales as this is what my petition was for and still leaving only one Mother and baby unit in Wales being in Swansea. My reason for starting this petition was to get a Mother and baby unit in North Wales to make a difference for many families in North Wales and for women who can have complications while pregnant and after delivery of a baby and within the first year after birth.

With 1 in 5 women experience difficulties with their mental health services during and after pregnancy this shows the demand that is needed for treatment and potential hospitalation in a Mother and baby unit. Possible complications are; anxiety, depression, Postpartum Psychosis, Post-traumatic stress disorder, Bipolar disorder, panic disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, Tokophobia (fear of birth), schizoaffective disorder, schizophrenia all of which could be a possible hospitalation.

Depression and anxiety are the most common mental health problems during pregnancy, around 12% of women experiencing depression and 13% experiencing anxiety at some point. Depression and anxiety also affect 15-20% in the first year after childbirth. Mental health complications can happen before birth, straight after and within the first year of having a baby. Suicide is a leading cause of deaths in the UK within a year after childbirth (rcog.org.uk)

Over 1400 women experience Postpartum Psychosis each year in the UK (1 to 2 in every 1000 mothers) Keeping mum and baby together is important not only for a woman's recovery but for mother-child bonding and an infants development (app-network.org)

Having this service in North West England means that this unit will serve:

North Wales: Wrexham, Flintshire, Denbighshire, Conwy, Gwynedd, Isle of Anglesey, and areas of Mid Wales, Powys and Ceredigion.

North West England serves: Blackburn and Darwen, Blackpool, Cheshire West and Chester, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Halton, Lancashire, Merseyside and Warrington. The population of North Wales and East England is considerably high.

North West England has two units already have two units in Wythenshawe with 10 beds and Chorley with 8 beds. When I needed a bed in 2019 a bed became available in Wythenshawe but the possible other locations were Birmingham and Edinburgh. This shows that getting a bed in a Mother and baby unit in in the UK is already hard with a national shortage, for example today Monday the 4th of April 2022 available Mother and baby on WebBeds NHS England 15 beds are available (I have attached a screen shot showing this) The area that is closest to North Wales is Medim/low today and I'm sure that these beds will quickly be taken, and then leaving many women without a option for a Mother and baby unit and then a Mum then being separated from their baby in a general psychiatric ward where the baby would be in the care of someone else for example a partner, family or social workers might get involved if there is no one to care for the baby. This is awful for a Mum to be separated from her baby and the effect on her mental health and her family is unimaginable.

It is very important to have loved ones close when in crisis which I have been through myself and my main reason for starting this petition with my experience of a hard time for me and my family and distance was a strain on us all and for me needing my family in an emergency situation was very traumatic and I'm sure that many families go through this also and is a huge stress for all involved. This would mean also that the English Government would need the funding from the Welsh Government for the cost of care of a Welsh patient in an English hospital.

Your planned proposal for this unit reinforces our reliance here in Wales on NHS England, when we could in fact use this opportunity to change this dynamic and instead lead the way. And as a Welsh woman, I feel as though I am playing second fiddle to English women and families, as my governance will have little control over the provision of our care.

So could this partnership involved in creating this unit not be more equal? Or, could it be something that Wales leads on and English families then access from us?

I am pleased to see that a timescale has now been specified and it is understandable of the process needed for a new Mother and baby unit to cover North Wales. However, it feels like a missed opportunity for us as my nation, to lead the way and that Welsh women and families are being deprioritised again. So the sooner this is done the better because this is an urgent service needed from North Wales and taking into account a lack of beds across the UK.

So I'm asking what are the reasons that the Welsh Government could not come up with the costs for a shared unit in North Wales?

With my personal situation of having Bipolar I knew I was high risk and if we want to have any more children it was recommended while I was under doctors in Manchester that I would need to be in a unit for the later half of a second pregnancy. This is therefore a very hard decision to make with the only options to be in England and a potential baby would be born in an English hospital with an English birth certificate, these plans do not currently guarantee support in my own language. I'm sure that you understand we would prefer a birthplace in Wales for a Welsh birth certificate of our proud Welsh heritage. This could also affect other families in our situation.

I am proud of my identity as a Welsh woman. But I feel that we could do so much for a nation to directly respond to the needs of our communities, particularly our rural communities, and create services of our own, without being at the mercy of another country's needs and decision-making. It's reassuring to know that the Welsh language is being considered and should be accessible within the new unit and that Welsh beds will be protected. But I am also worried that the service being available in Welsh in an English hospital and wherever the beds will be kept for Welsh patients. It is essential for a Welsh speaking individual in a crisis situation to be able to speak Welsh, where in my experience I prefer to speak my first language at a time of mental health situations especially when I'm talking about my true feelings and needs at this time this is important for the mental health of the individual. I'm sure that other individuals in my situation would prefer to speak Welsh as well. But going back to the lack of beds across the UK this new unit might fill with English patients and therefore Welsh patients will still have to travel further a field away from support of family and friends and this concerns me because of the experience I had.

So I please ask you to think of my situation and others in my situation at this current time and in the future. There is an urgent need for a Mother and baby unit in North Wales for many families and I would not like to see other families go through the difficulties which we did in 2019. I hope that you consider having a Mother and baby unit in a North Wales hospital, with a perinatal care service already in the Aled Glyn Clwyd hospital this would be an ideal possible site. It appears that the care isn't and hasn't been in place for a number of decades and that is why you can't see enough evidence for demand to have a standalone unit in North Wales.

As I have mentioned above the lack of beds across the UK which I believe the UK Government need to do more to ensure more beds for mothers in crisis at this time of need due to various mental health complications during and after pregnancy and in the first year after childbirth. Giving support and high standard of care at a difficult time for mothers and their families and this preventing them travelling long distance for this essential service.

I have had a lot of support and messages from individuals backing me and sharing stories while I was sharing the petition on Facebook and Instagram. Also having media attention and coverage BBC Wales, S4C, BBC radio Wales, Radio Cymru, Free press Denbighshire, Daily Post North Wales, ITV Wales resulting in public support and they are supporting me and backing my petition. Also backing from MP'S and three charities NSPCC, APP (Action on Postpartum Psychosis) and FTWW (Fair Treatment for the women of Wales) who are very supportive of this petition and also agree with the points that I have raised in this campaign.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further to explore whether there are any ways that these proposals could become more equal in terms of ownership, management and therefore, access.

Committee could you please think and understand my reasons for starting this petition and all the points I have raised, I have worked hard on this and would appreciate your time of looking at my reasons and evidence of the need for a Mother and baby unit in North Wales.

Kind regards,
Nia Foulkes