

1 The Royal College of Nursing welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Health and Social Care Committee's call for evidence on the availability of bariatric services in Wales. The RCN is the world's largest professional union of nurses, representing over 420,000 nurses, midwives, health visitors, nursing students and health care support workers, including over 24,000 members in Wales. The majority of RCN members work in the NHS with around a quarter working in the independent sector. The RCN works locally, nationally and internationally to promote standards of care and the interests of patients and nurses, and of nursing as a profession. The RCN is a UK-wide organisation, with its own National Boards for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The RCN is a major contributor to nursing practice, standards of care, and public policy as it affects health and nursing.

2. Effectiveness of Level 3 and 4 Services

Bariatric surgery is expensive, however the NICE appraisal has suggested that there is a good economic case to be made for it if the guidance on clinical thresholds is adhered to. Because it is more effective than anything else that is offered for obesity, the short term costs of surgery and follow up can outweigh the long term costs of obesity and obesity related diseases.

A recent systematic review concludes that "Bariatric surgery provides substantial and sustained effects on weight loss and ameliorates obesity-attributable comorbidities in the majority of bariatric patients, although risks of complication, reoperation, and death exist. Death rates were lower than those reported in previous meta-analyses."¹

3. Eligibility Criteria. Our members have told us of individuals that they have cared for who have not met the eligibility criteria in Wales and have therefore had to pay privately for treatment. The eligibility criteria in Wales differs from that in England and patients have to have a higher BMI and they must have uncontrolled co-morbidities. The RCN is concerned therefore that that patients in Wales do not have the same intervention choices as patients in England.

4. Availability of Obesity Surgery and Specialist Weight Management Services across Wales.

Our members have told us that the availability of specialist weight management services is patchy across Wales and is a particular concern in rural areas. At the last meeting of the Welsh National Obesity Forum attendees were told that the limited services that do exist in Wales were at risk of reduced funding.

It is not only members of the public using the NHS who may be obese, it is estimated that 700,000 NHS employees are obese². Yet there are no specialist weight management services in place in Wales, even though obesity is a known factor in staff sickness and absence.

5. The Royal College of Nursing is concerned that the Inquiry is only looking at the provision of bariatric services, particularly surgery in Wales rather than looking at how equipped the NHS in Wales is for caring for obese patients more generally.

¹ "The Effectiveness and Risks of Bariatric Surgery - An Updated Systematic Review and Meta-analysis, 2003-2012" Su-Hsin Chang, PhD; Carolyn R. T. Stoll, MPH, MSW; Jihyun Song, PhD; J. Esteban Varela, MD, MPH; Christopher J. Eagon, MD; Graham A. Colditz, MD, DrPH

² <http://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/sites/default/files/action-on-obesity.pdf>

Obese people use health and social services more than the general population, and require specialist transport, movement and handling and equipment to ensure that their safety and dignity is maintained. Our members are concerned that there aren't sufficient bariatric beds, trolleys, wheelchairs etc in our hospitals question whether our hospital environments are able to accommodate this specialist equipment (for example a bariatric bed and hoist takes up two bed spaces on a hospital ward.) For example in Cardiff and the Vale Bariatric equipment is managed under the total bed management contract by Medstrom, they provide: Beds & Mattresses, Hoists (slings from procurement), Chairs, Commodes/shower chairs (All of the above has varying safe working loads). However some of the above items are available 24/7 and some only office hour's weekdays.

There are long delays in obtaining specialist equipment in community settings and members tell us that these delays can be exacerbated when there are disagreements as to whether this equipment is paid for by the NHS or Social Services. We have also been told that because NHS procurement processes don't include input from clinical staff that equipment bought doesn't always meet patients' needs.

Nursing bariatric patients can be a health and safety issue for our members. Nursing staff need specialist training on caring for and assessment of obese patients as well as manual handling and use of specialist equipment. The RCN Employment Survey 2013 shows that nurses in Wales are least able to access Continuous Professional Development opportunities than their counterparts in the rest of the rest of the UK, the RCN is therefore concerned that are our nursing staff in Wales are not adequately prepared to care for this client group.