

Resilience and Preparedness of Health and Social Care Services in Wales for Brexit

Stakeholder session: Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB), Caerleon

Date: Monday, 6 November 2017

Time: 14:00 – 15:30

Assembly Members present: Dawn Bowden, Mark Isherwood and Steffan Lewis

Main issues facing health and social care services in Wales as a result of Brexit

- Overall there is a lack of clarity and direction in relation to Brexit.
- Potential impact of Brexit on the workforce and the future of the workforce, particularly in relation to retaining and attracting employees from overseas.
- Longer term implications of Brexit for the people of Wales. For example, if Brexit has a negative impact on the economy this could affect the health and wellbeing of the population.
- Not knowing what the impact of Brexit might be for healthcare in Wales and the potential knock on effects for the NHS, tourism and the economy if restrictions on free movement and access to healthcare are introduced.

Preparedness of Welsh health and social care services for Brexit, and actions underway to assess and plan for the possible impacts of different Brexit scenarios

- The lack of clarity and direction makes contingency planning difficult, and as a result conversations around scenario planning have yet to begin. Participants felt that they need a better understanding of the potential outcomes in order to start preparing. No Brexit impact assessment or guidance from the Welsh Government on health and social care services is available
- The workforce is already being adversely affected– through an increasing sense of anxiety. Messages relating to Brexit need to be managed carefully to front line staff, especially at a time when retaining staff is crucial, but important to be honest as well.
- At shop floor level, it is difficult to think about Brexit when facing so many day-to-day challenges and shortages. Brexit is not the main topic of conversation on the wards.
- It would be helpful for all health boards and local authorities to work together on an all-Wales basis in preparation for Brexit, rather than on an individual basis. It would also be useful to have possible scenarios and solutions set out for different health sectors. One of the advantages of Wales being small is that organisations, through existing “peer groups” can work together on emerging issues.

- Ultimately, accountability should sit with the government as to how they will prepare, plan and support different sectors for Brexit and the Welsh Government should be planning for what we currently know.

Advice, support or assistance received/wanted from the Welsh Government in preparation for Brexit

- No advice, support or assistance has been received to date. Some guidance received has been from the NHS Confederation. No formal communication has been received which has made it difficult to advise staff and respond to any concerns they have. Not aware of information available from the Welsh Government apart from one or two events e.g. View from the Bay Brexit Event.
- There was an expectation that there would have been more engagement by this point as well as a clearer idea of what Brexit will look like.
- One participant recently qualified participant explained that during her studies, no information or advice was filtered through from the Welsh Government to her University. As such, it is difficult for those entering the medical profession to make informed decisions on the likely impact of Brexit on different fields within health and social care services.
- Information about implications of different Brexit scenarios should come from UK and Welsh Government. High level overview by Welsh Government of potential impacts on sectors of different negotiation outcomes would be helpful.
- It would be helpful to have a steer from Welsh Government on the areas in which health boards in Wales should be thinking about scenario planning.
- Need honesty by Welsh Government in relation to the likely outcome of Brexit and advice for organisations how to mitigate any changes.

Engagement with Welsh Government

- ABUHB has contributed to consultation responses and provided evidence but is unaware of how the evidence was considered and do not recall receiving any feedback or progress updates.
- ABUHB has all the mechanisms for communicating the possible implications of Brexit (newsletter, intranet, staff forum etc.) but is unclear on what it should be communicating without a clear steer from the Welsh Government.
- One participant suggested that conversations may be taking place at a higher level, but this is not being filtered down to frontline staff.

Main recommendations to the Welsh Government at this stage of the negotiation process

- Health Boards in Wales need more accurate information and a clear steer on the likely outcome of Brexit from the Welsh Government so that they can start making informed decisions.
- Impact assessment to allow health boards to plan accordingly.
- Money should be ring-fenced for the healthcare sector as it's a crucial sector. Important to note that healthcare cannot be looked at in isolation – also need to look at social care.
- One participant queried whether ABUHB can take steps internally before seeking answers from the Welsh Government. For example, whether improvements could be made in data capture. It would also be useful to have a mechanism to capture the views and concerns of the workforce which would highlight whether there were commonalities/similar anxieties amongst the workforce.

Mechanisms for communicating and collating information on the possible implications of Brexit for the health board with/ from staff

- Support was given to staff after the referendum.
- There are communication channels across the organisation but staff have not been asked to share their opinion on Brexit and the implications for Wales. There has been no organisation-wide conversation on it.
- Entry level jobs – there is a large eastern European contingent in roles such as care workers and porters. Experienced difficulty in securing applications from UK nationals for these roles.
- Care home sector is a concern as a significant part of the workforce is from overseas.

EU and third country workforce

- There is some data available on the number of migrant workers. Numbers are quite low but significant.
- ABUHB has an employee and recruitment system where data is collected, but not all information is mandatory. Employees are requested but not required to submit certain information. As such, there are big gaps in the data which creates an inaccurate picture.
- There has been a heavy reliance on overseas recruitment as a result of existing and long term recruitment challenges. ABUHB has increasingly had to go overseas, particularly to Europe, India and the Philippines to fill elements of the rota due to a lack of expertise/lack of interest in the UK.

However, recruitment from overseas can create other challenges around training, language and costs.

- Some of the ABUHB's experienced, highly-skilled workers from the EU have expressed a desire to return to the EU because of the uncertainty surrounding the Brexit process. Staff have concerns in areas such as pensions and their right to stay in the UK. For EU citizens working in the UK, the debate is moving away from whether they are allowed to stay, and more towards whether it's attractive for them to stay.
- There has been a decrease in the number of EU nurses applying for work in the UK. Only 50 EU nurses arrived in the UK this year, compared to nearly 2,000 the year before. NMC standards are off-putting for some EU nurses.
- Received slightly fewer applications from outside the EU last year. In the previous year, the ABUHB recruited a significant amount of nurses from outside the EU. However, the turnover rate was high, largely due to issues around settling in the UK and successfully passing language tests. Although tests are being relaxed, the ABUHB is seeing less interest from people wishing to relocate to the UK from outside the EU.
- The language requirements for all nurses is a significant barrier in terms of recruitment and once recruited many nurses struggle to meet the standard required and pass at Level 7 despite receiving language training "English as a Second Language" by the Health Board.
- Combined with issues such as an ageing workforce and the pay cap, the impact on the workforce will be significant if the trend continues. Recognise that there is a need to start thinking about impact of Brexit on workforce if health boards will be unable to recruit EU nationals. Adjustments to future business planning will need to be made. However, they are currently working on the assumption that the EU workforce can be retained.
- There is also a focus on domestic recruitment – school and college visits and work experience programmes across the health boards. It is also hoped that the part time route for training nurses and other health care professionals will have a positive impact on recruitment.

Potential impact of Brexit on funding the NHS and how the health board is preparing for different funding scenarios

- Provisions inflation is a big concern. In its budget, 70% is labour-related and 30% is 'non-staff' related, a large proportion of which is provisions. Inflation from June 2016 to June 2017 was 8.1%. When coupled with a 12% reduction in the currency, this has impacted on the price of food, for example the cost of milk and cheese is increasing. ABUHB only has £3.90 a day to feed a patient

so they will have to look again at their menu, buying in a different way, reduce waste and create greater efficiencies.

- On a national level, procurement colleagues are joined into the national procurement service contracts, which many would consider to be better value for money as they are bigger buyers.
- The NHS has been trying to do deliver more on less money whilst maintaining quality of care and creating greater efficiencies, for some time. If the economy does not do well, the NHS is unlikely to thrive. There is also a link between the wealth of an area and the health and well-being of its population. A negative impact on the economy could result in more pressures on the NHS.
- EU funding for research could also be impacted, including access to clinical trials, but it could also be an opportunity to think more globally about funding where the focus has always been on EU funding. Other EU programmes might be impacted e.g. Flying Start