

## PRESS RELEASE

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### NHS puts dignity at the heart of caring for older people

The NHS is committed to helping older people raise their expectations of hospital care.

That's the message from the Welsh NHS Confederation as NHS bodies in Wales formally respond to the report by the Older People's Commissioner for Wales, *Dignified Care?*

The Welsh NHS Confederation, which represents all Local Health Boards and NHS Trusts in Wales, says its members are already putting the report's recommendations into action.

Helen Birtwhistle, the Director of the Welsh NHS Confederation, said:

"Caring for people with compassion and dignity goes right to the heart of what the NHS does.

"The health service is there to make people feel better, and where care has actually done the opposite and made patients feel worse, that is simply unacceptable.

"We know that the vast majority of all NHS staff want to do their best for their patients. Sometimes though we all need reminding that simple steps can make a huge positive difference.

"We support the message that older people must raise their expectations of the care they receive in our hospitals. The NHS is clear in its response to the Commissioner that we are fully committed to meeting those raised expectations."

In their responses, the seven Local Health Boards in Wales and Velindre NHS Trust describe how they are putting dignity and respect at the top of the boardroom agenda.

Examples of how the NHS is supporting its staff to improve hospital care include:

- Appointing new specialist dementia nurses to train general ward staff in the care of older patients with dementia
- Ward sisters being given the authority to select their own ward staff and manage their development
- Making changes to ward layout to provide separate quiet rooms for private consultations

- Using “dignity pegs” to ensure curtains remain closed during treatment
- Running campaigns to recruit volunteer “befrienders” to spend time with patients and run errands for them
- Talking to patients and recording their story of their hospital stay to gain more insight into the patient’s view of the care they have received
- Creating mock-up rooms of new hospital wards and inviting older people to give their opinions on design and layout
- Writing a “dignity charter” to display at the bedside so that every patient knows their right to expect dignified care
- Giving each executive director on the board a specific, personal objective on dignity and respect

Ms Birtwhistle added:

“A lot of these initiatives are already happening on many of our hospital wards across Wales. The challenge now is to make sure this high standard is applied everywhere.”

Ms Birtwhistle said the NHS wants to create a culture where patients feel comfortable to speak up if they feel their dignity and privacy is being compromised.

“Going into hospital can be a daunting experience and many patients feel very vulnerable, but we want to make sure patients have the confidence to challenge poor practice.

“With the progress being made by NHS organisations in Wales, we are confident that when the Older People’s Commissioner returns, many of the problems she witnessed will be gone for good.”

**Ends**

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## Notes to Editors

- The Welsh NHS Confederation is the independent voice of the NHS in Wales. We represent all the organisations making up the NHS in Wales. All seven Local Health Boards and three NHS Trusts are members.
- The Older People's Commissioner for Wales released the report *Dignified Care? The experiences of older people in hospital in Wales* on 14 March 2011. The seven Local Health Boards in Wales and Velindre NHS Trust were subject to the review, which looked at the experiences of older people who have spent five or more consecutive days in hospital during the period June 2008 – June 2010. Using the Commissioner's legal powers the organisations subject to recommendations in the report were required to respond in writing by 14 June 2011.
- The report from the Older People's Commissioner for Wales is available here:  
<http://www.olderpeoplewales.com/en/Reviews/dignity-and-respect/Hospital-review.aspx>