

Bay Watch

17 March 2009



About Bay Watch

Bay Watch is a weekly political briefing for Welsh NHS Confederation members that is focused on health issues and policies being discussed and debated in the National Assembly for Wales.

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Last Week at the Assembly

Restructuring statement

The Minister outlined the next steps after the close of the consultation period for Delivering the new NHS for Wales, during which 413 responses were received. The Minister confirmed her intention to proceed, subject to legal orders and regulations, to establish the six new local health boards in shadow form from 1 June 2009, and for these bodies to be fully operational from 1 October 2009.

Ms Hart said she would consider whether to introduce a Director of Therapies and Scientific Services on the boards of the new LHBs. She also intends to carry out further work on:

- The interface between the professional forum and the statutory committees.
- The functions and services that are currently undertaken by Health Commission Wales. These services will be organised collaboratively through the new LHBs.
- Avoiding duplication between the stakeholder reference groups and community health councils.

Conservative health spokesperson, Andrew RT Davies, accused the Minister of creating a “command-and-control-from-the-centre model”. He also raised

the issue of a lack of confidence amongst clinicians in the consultation process.

Helen Mary Jones (Llanelli, Plaid Cymru) asked the Minister to consider identifying a board member to represent carers. She also suggested new names should be introduced instead of the term “Local Health Board” to avoid perceptions of a takeover.

Liberal Democrat health spokesperson, Peter Black, expressed concern about the direct influence that the Minister will have over the day-to-day running of the NHS, and argued that the boards need to be at arm’s length from WAG.

Jonathan Morgan (Cardiff North, Conservative) asked for clarity on the costs of the restructuring, to which Ms Hart said that discussions were ongoing.

Mark Isherwood (North Wales, Conservative) raised concerns of constituents that the North Wales board was too large, and out of line with arrangements for South Wales.

Read the full transcript of the statement and debate here:
<http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-chamber/bus-chamber-third-assembly-rop.htm?act=dis&id=120073&ds=3/2009#3>

Questions to the Minister for Health and Social Services

NHS orthodontic treatment

The Minister met with Professor Wayne Richards, the chair of the dental contract review group, and asked that an expert sub-group be established to look at orthodontic provision. The Minister added that she had noticed an increased volume of correspondence from Assembly Members and the public about orthodontic treatment.

Ambulance service

Ms Hart remains concerned about the “unacceptable levels of performance across Wales”. However, she added: “I also recognise that it is a difficult period and that ambulance staff have worked exceptionally hard to try to deliver on the targets.” She intends to make a statement on ambulance services during the next month, which could outline further work to address handover times at A&E.

Vascular diseases

A group of expert clinicians will be established to look at strengthening prevention policy. The Minister also outlined plans to deal with recent public criticism of stroke services.

Junior doctors

The Minister said the NHS will try to ensure that enough staff are in place to comply with the European Working Time Directive. She said that discussions are under way with postgraduate deans to establish short-term training opportunities for overseas doctors, in order to ease the problems of recruiting to junior doctor posts.

Elderly and Mentally Infirm

The Minister said it was the responsibility of local government to deal with the matter of the closure of a care home in Dinas Powys.

Cardiff Royal Infirmary

The Minister welcomed the Hunter Report on the CRI site, and the plans to have primary care, unscheduled

care, mental health services, outpatient provision, and office administration provided on the site.

Childhood obesity

The MEND (Mind, Exercise, Nutrition...Do it!) childhood obesity programme was launched in January and will support 2,000 children and their families to manage weight problems.

Community Health Councils

The Minister reiterated her commitment to strengthening the role of CHCs.

Read the full transcript here;

<http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-chamber/bus-chamber-third-assembly-rop.htm?act=dis&id=120513&ds=3/2009#1>

Written answers were issued in response to questions on improving the health of the people of Swansea, maternity services in Newport, sleep apnoea services and the Gwent Clinical Futures programme.

Read the answers here:

<http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-chamber/bus-chamber-third-assembly-rop.htm?act=dis&id=120485&ds=3/2009#1>

First Minister's Questions

Patient safety

The First Minister will consider whether the reporting of patient safety incidents should be made compulsory for the new Local Health Boards. He raised the issue of staff feeling discouraged from reporting incidents if they felt it could cause a “hoo-hah” in the press.

Read the full transcript here:

<http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-chamber/bus-chamber-third-assembly-rop.htm?act=dis&id=120073&ds=3/2009#1>

Access to medicines debate

The Conservatives raised concerns about LHBs underspending on their drugs budgets while also saying 'no' to patients asking for new, modern medicines. Conservative health spokesperson, Andrew RT Davies, called for money to be ring-fenced for new drugs, citing a lack of consistency in the way in which LHBs work, often operating "behind closed doors".

Liberal Democrat health spokesperson, Peter Black, said he took a simple view of medicine, that if a drug is licensed and a clinical practitioner thinks that a patient needs it, it should be funded, irrespective of whether NICE or the all-Wales medicines strategy group has an alternative view. He called for LHB appeals committees to have a medical practitioner on them.

Health Minister, Edwina Hart raised wider issues about unnecessary and ineffective drugs, and, in some cases, drugs that are harmful. She highlighted improvements that have recently been agreed in the operation of the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence. She also pointed to the Routledge Report, which contains recommendations intended to ensure that Welsh patients have access to effective medicines as soon as they are available. The Minister will ask a group to implement the report's findings in due course.

Read the full transcript of the debate here: <http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-chamber/bus-chamber-third-assembly-rop.htm?act=dis&id=120513&ds=3/2009#dadlceidsmedic>

Read Professor Routledge's report here: <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/documents/Routledge-Report-January-2009.pdf>

Cross-border healthcare

The transcript has now been published of the session in which Mike Ponton, Director of the Welsh NHS Confederation, gave evidence to the European and External Affairs Committee on patients' rights in cross-border healthcare. Representatives from the Welsh Assembly Government and the BMA also gave evidence. Amongst the issues discussed were the administrative burden of managing the inflow and outflow of patients, payment systems and the provision of correct information for patients.

Read the transcript in full here: <http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-committees/bus-committees-third1/bus-committees-third-eur-home/bus-committees-third-eur-agendas.htm?act=dis&id=119916&ds=3/2009#3>

Health Committee

Darren Millar (Clwyd West, Conservative) has been elected Chair of the Health, Wellbeing and Local Government Committee, replacing Jonathan Morgan.

See the full membership of the committee here: <http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-committees/bus-committees-third1/bus-committees-third-hwlg-home/bus-committees-third-hwlg-mem.htm>

Press releases issued

WAG launches consultation on new strategy to improve community nursing <http://new.wales.gov.uk/news/topic/health/2009/090309nursing/?lang=en>

New state-of-the-art health centre for Bargoed <http://new.wales.gov.uk/news/topic/health/2009/090309healthcentre/?lang=en>

New chairs to lead Local Health Boards appointed
<http://new.wales.gov.uk/news/topic/health/2009/090310healthboards/?lang=en>

Contracted-out frontline support staff at Neath-Port Talbot Hospital to return to NHS
<http://new.wales.gov.uk/news/topic/health/2009/090310staff/?lang=en>

Epilepsy plan for Wales forges ahead
<http://new.wales.gov.uk/news/topic/health/2009/090311epilepsy/?lang=en>

First open MRI scanner in Wales launched in Aberystwyth
<http://new.wales.gov.uk/news/topic/health/2009/090311scanner/?lang=en>

One Wales commitment to boost health R&D met
<http://new.wales.gov.uk/news/topic/health/2009/090311research/?lang=en>

Hard-hitting television commercial aims to end organ donor crisis in Wales
<http://new.wales.gov.uk/news/topic/health/2009/090312organdonor/?lang=en>

This Week at the Assembly

First Minister's Questions

The First Minister will be asked to comment on:

- the effects of the smoking ban in Wales
- meeting the communication needs of stroke patients
- improving the efficiency of service delivery in the NHS.

Read the full list of questions here:
<http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-chamber/bus-chamber-third-assembly-oral.htm?act=dis&id=119097&ds=3/2009>

Health Committee

The Health, Wellbeing and Local Government Committee will continue its inquiry into Community Mental Health Services, hearing evidence from Mary Burrows, Chief Executive of North Wales NHS Trust, during its Thursday meeting. The committee will also hear from the Deputy Minister of Social Services, Gwenda Thomas, as part of its inquiry into CAFCASS Cymru.

See more details in Thursday's agenda:
<http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-committees/bus-committees-third1/bus-committees-third-hwlg-home/bus-committees-third-hwlg-agendas.htm?act=dis&id=120546&ds=3/2009>

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About the Welsh NHS Confederation

The Welsh NHS Confederation represents the organisations making up the NHS in Wales: trusts and local health boards. We act as an independent voice in the drive for better health and better healthcare through our policy and influencing work, and by supporting members with events, information and training. To find out more about us go to -

www.welshconfed.org