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## **NHS Wales looks to a changing future**

Hospitals with rows of beds – for many people this remains the traditional image of the NHS. But will the NHS in Wales look like this in 2020?

The fact is, even in 2010 this image is becoming out of date – more than 80% of encounters between patients and the NHS don't take place in hospital at all and we've had huge falls in waiting times, while the number of hospital beds needed is going down, not up.

So an NHS fit for the 21st century is not just about beds and hospitals.

This change is already happening and by 2020 it means that the NHS will look very different from the image many of us are used to.

The NHS in Wales is facing a huge financial challenge with significantly less resources available. This puts us at a defining moment for the future of the NHS in Wales.

We also have to keep up with a fast-changing world. The world of 2010 – let alone 2020 – is a very different from the world of 1948, when the NHS was set up.

People are now living longer – Wales has the highest percentage of over-65 year olds in the UK, and one of the highest levels in Europe.

Much of the work undertaken by the NHS these days is helping people live with chronic conditions, which account for around 60% of hospital stays and a staggering 80% of GP appointments.

Such conditions are closely linked to our aging population and the lifestyle choices we all make. There have also been huge changes in medical practice. As our knowledge grows, so too does the list of treatments that can be provided.

Advances in technology mean that the results of x-rays, scans and laboratory tests can be e-mailed, speeding up the diagnostic process. And patients, doctors and nurses can talk to each other via video links, often saving unnecessary travel.

Today's public rightly expect the NHS to meet much higher standards. Patients are better informed about health issues, and they want greater involvement in their care.

These are just some of the changes in the world around us – and the NHS has to keep pace.

So what will the future look like? We believe that there are three key trends, and some examples here in Wales of where this future is already happening.

Improving health, as well as treating sickness

Supporting people to stay healthy is better for them. And problems such as obesity, smoking and binge drinking put a huge burden on the NHS.

One example of how we're supporting people already is school nurses in Mid Wales who have set up a text messaging service for young people.

This service, the first of its kind in Wales, gives pupils a contact point with health professionals on subjects they may have found embarrassing to discuss via technology they already use daily.

More services closer to home.

Hospital care is coming out of the hospital building. The vast majority of NHS care is already provided locally, and the trend is for more to follow.

In North Wales nurses can deliver chemotherapy to cancer patients in community clinics, or even in their own home allowing patients more time at home with their families, improving their quality of life.

Digital cameras and internet links between GPs and hospitals mean that patients with a skin complaint can get a specialist opinion more quickly, without having to go to hospital.

Hospital care – in for a day not for a stay

If you do need to go to hospital, developments such as keyhole surgery mean it's increasingly likely you'll be in for a day, not for a stay.

All these trends are already happening – by 2020 they will be even more widespread.

It means the future will be very different from the beds-and-hospitals image we are used to. But one thing is clear – it's a change that has to happen if we are to deliver 21st-century care for the people of Wales.