

PRESS RELEASE

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New survey shows Welsh public pragmatic about NHS changes

People in Wales say they don't mind travelling for specialist services if it means the care will be of higher quality. And they do not support keeping old hospital buildings open if they are not fit for modern healthcare.

Those are just two of the findings of a survey of more than 1,000 people, commissioned by the Welsh NHS Confederation and conducted by YouGov. The survey, published on the day of the Confederation's Annual Conference and Exhibition, demonstrates strong support for the NHS in Wales, and for the quality of its services.

The Conference, and the survey report, come at a watershed for the Welsh NHS, just a week after the Minister for Health and Social Services unveiled 'Together for Health', the government's five-year vision for health services in Wales.

The Confederation, which represents the seven Health Boards and three NHS Trusts in Wales, has been arguing for some time that changes to health services are necessary and unavoidable. It has also asked politicians to use their extensive influence in their local communities to support change where it is clear that a different way of doing things will benefit patients.

While the Confederation acknowledges that change is rarely popular, it now seems that the Welsh public are prepared to be pragmatic about certain aspects of changes to the NHS if they are shown to be of benefit. They also appear to recognise there are tough choices ahead for the future of the NHS.

Key findings show that overall attitudes are very positive towards the NHS and most people feel informed about services in their local area. When asked about their attitudes to the care given to them or a family member by the NHS in Wales, 60% said they were pleased; only 16% displeased. They were also complimentary towards the attitude of staff during their most recent experience of the NHS, with 58% saying they, or their relative, had received good levels of dignity and respect (whilst 15% disagreed). And they felt that the attitude of medical staff (65%) and non-medical staff had been positive (57%).

In addition, 53% said the health service is run well in Wales as opposed to 21% who think it is run badly. While most Welsh adults think the NHS offers good value for money - 50% agreed, opposed to 17% who disagreed - people seem to have little understanding of the actual cost. When asked what they thought was the cost of the NHS in Wales (£6.4 billion), most people (70%) said they didn't know. Of those who thought they knew, on average, they thought the service cost £75 billion. When told the correct figure, only 13% said that they thought it too much.

Overall, attitudes to concentrating services in fewer, larger hospitals are negative with most people opposing this, and believing their local hospital should provide every type of service. Despite this, most

people then said they did not ‘mind travelling for specialist care if it means the care will be higher quality.’

Only 15% agreed with the statement that ‘the NHS should keep old hospital buildings open, even if they are not fit for modern healthcare’. And 75% supported the statement that ‘more can be done to care for people at home and prevent them from having to go to hospital in the first place.’

Helen Birtwhistle, Director of the Welsh NHS Confederation, said the survey results provide a ‘fascinating snapshot’ of public attitudes towards the NHS in Wales, with some surprises.

She said: “A great deal of opposition to change, particularly from politicians, is based on the premise that the public won’t accept it. In fact, while it is clear that people believe their local hospital should provide every type of health service for the local community, for example, they are nonetheless prepared to accept change if it improves quality and safety.

“That is a major breakthrough and will help the NHS in fulfilling its responsibility to demonstrate that where changes are proposed, these will be based on clinical evidence and the advice of experts. The fact that people also recognise the value of care closer to home and in local communities seems to reinforce the move to find new and innovative ways to provide health services away from hospitals, where that is appropriate.

“It is heartening to know the level of public support for the NHS in Wales. In turn, the Welsh health service will be open and honest with the people of Wales in explaining and working through the choices that need to be made.”

Ends

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Notes to Editors

- All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1,004 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 27th October - 1st November 2011. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all Welsh adults (aged 18+).

- 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 Welsh NHS Confederation Annual Conference and Exhibition is taking place at Cardiff City Stadium, Thursday 10 November, from 8.45am. More information on the conference is [here](#). For a media pass, please contact Sian Pugh.