

MEETING	FULL COUNCIL
DATE	1 March 2012
TITLE	BETSI CADWALADR UNIVERSITY HEALTH BOARD
PURPOSE	To submit a report for consideration following the meeting of the Care Scrutiny Committee on 7 February 2012
RECOMMENDATION	<p>To consider the following recommendations and to act as appropriate. That the Care Scrutiny Committee:</p> <p>i) expresses a lack of confidence in the manner in which Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board has communicated with the Community Health Council and the public regarding the decisions involving the short-term closure arrangements of hospital wards in Gwynedd.</p> <p>ii) asks the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board to review its arrangements to ensure an improvement in the consultation and communication procedure of this type in future.</p>
AUTHOR	Councillor Peter Read Chairman of the Care Scrutiny Committee

BACKGROUND

1. The Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (Health Board) is collaborating with Gwynedd Council to develop an effective scrutiny procedure. We are awaiting guidelines from the Welsh Government in due course but in the meantime the Health Board has agreed to attend meetings of the Council's Care Scrutiny Committees. Indeed, this is the only Health Board in Wales which has ventured to do this and there is a need to acknowledge at the start that this is an experimental process for the time being.
2. At its meeting on 7 February, the Care Scrutiny Committee (the Committee), members discussed several matters that had been submitted for their consideration by the Health Board. Also, letters from the Chief Executive of the Health Board to the Clerks of Pwllheli Town Council and Llanystumdwy Community Council, were distributed to members for information.

3. Following the questioning of representatives of the Health Board at the meeting, the Committee continued to be dissatisfied with some of the responses given and wish to convey those concerns for the attention of the full Council. The main concerns are listed under the headings shown below:

- Emergency / Safety of Patients
- Engagement / Consultation
- Governance / Management

EMERGENCY - SAFETY OF PATIENTS

4. Members of the Committee are comfortable with the basic principle of ensuring that decisions with regard to dealing with situations that are critical to the safety of patients are in the hands of clinical officers who assess medical risks which lead to a decision to act. Nevertheless, members are not comfortable with the procedure of making a decision and then implementing it and definitely and specifically in terms of communication. The rationale followed by the clinicians in reaching their decision to close Hafan Ward and then Llŷn Ward (Ysbyty Bryn Beryl) without warning in December 2012 is noted below:

5. The following is noted in a letter, dated 16 January, 2012, from the Chief Executive of the Health Board to the Clerk of Llanystumdwy Community Council: *'As a responsible Health Board, our main priority is the safety of patients. The organisation is led by clinicians and we have a duty of care to all our patients. As pressure started to increase, all clinical staff had to make urgent decisions so that patient safety was not compromised'* and *'The changes to Hafan Ward (Ysbyty Bryn Beryl) were made in order to safeguard patient safety.'*

6. Members of the Committee were not convinced by the responses of the officers of the Health Board that there was evidence to show that the clinicians, when they had made their urgent decision, had considered the risk to the safety of vulnerable patients in having to travel over 50 miles to receive care or to be referred to inappropriate provision more locally.

7. In the same letter (and in a letter to the Clerk of Pwllheli Town Council), dated 19 January 2012, it is noted that one reason for the closure was that *'Of the 402 patients admitted, 320 patients had Pwllheli post codes. Therefore, from the perspective of the other 82 patients, other hospitals in Gwynedd would have been more appropriate and nearer to their homes.'*

8. Again, there is no evidence that the Health Board was aware that the reason for choosing patients to be admitted to Ysbyty Bryn Beryl was for the patients to be nearer their families (rather than their homes). This would be likely to expedite their recovery.

ENGAGEMENT / CONSULTATION

- 9 In the letter from the Chief Executive of the Health Board to the Clerk of Pwllheli Town Council on 19 January 2012, the following is noted: ‘ *When the decision was made to reduce services in north Wales for an interim period over the winter [namely, the decision to close Llŷn Ward in Ysbyty Bryn Beryl] our staff, the Community Health Council, GPs, elected members and partnership organisations were informed as soon as possible and within 24 hours of making the decision.*’
- 10 There was no evidence to show that this had taken place and therefore Members are not convinced of this. This was not acceptable to members.

GOVERNANCE / MANAGEMENT

- 11 In the same letter, it is noted ‘ *In circumstances where temporary changes are needed to ensure short-term safety, we retain the right for these to be implemented immediately so that the skills of our staff can be used to care for the most ill patients. Under such circumstances, we will inform the Community Health Board of our intention and our reasons, in terms of safety, for taking such decisions and this is what we have done this time.*’
- 12 It is likely that the decision took place sometime before 20 December. It appears that the Chief Executive, Chairman and Vice-chairman of Gwynedd Community Health Council were informed on 20 December but members of the Community Health Council or key stakeholders were not informed until 22 December. Again, this was not acceptable to members.
- 13 Members are concerned that there is no evidence of effective collaboration between the Clinicians and the Health Board and there are no appropriate arrangements in place in terms of clear and timely communication between the Health Board, the Gwynedd Community Health Council, GPs, elected members and partnership organisations.
- 14 This is the case for situations that arise urgently and in general from the perspective of service planning and provision. Members consider that such a situation is unacceptable.
- 15 Health Board officers accepted the need to look at means of improving communication. The above experiences confirms the need to do this.

RECOMMENDATION

Members of the Council are requested to consider the following recommendations and to act as appropriate. The Care Scrutiny Committee:

i) expresses a lack of confidence in the manner in which Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board has communicated with the Community Health Council and the public regarding the decisions involving the short-term closure arrangements of hospital wards in Gwynedd.

ii) asks the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board to review its arrangements to ensure an improvement in the consultation and communication procedure of this type in future.