

Quotations that challenge BCUHB’s decisions in the Welsh Uplands

(The Scrutiny Committee might consider seeking answers to at least some of them)

1. **PROOF** that the decision to close the Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital and removing services was based more on financial considerations than on the level of healthcare:-

- (i) *“If there is clarity that the additional investment is limited to a defined period of no more than 3 years then this approach, resulting in financial gain in the long term, could be seen as a reasonable way in which to effect sustainable change.”*
- (ii) *“We made it quite clear that we didn’t have the extra revenue to establish new services ...”*

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This was further proved by the Health Board’s own ‘Service Planning Committee’ in its official report–

- (iii) *“Developing a new Centre on the FfMH site will mean that the old Health Centre Building will no longer be required, although the X-ray extension of the Health Centre site is likely to be needed for a car park). This estate rationalisation will generate savings in terms of running costs and together with improved efficiency costs of the redeveloped FfMH site, should mean that the associated benefits will be demonstrated in the next 2 – 4 years.”*

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2. **ABJECT FAILURE**

“It was announced that chief executive Mary Burrows and chairman Professor Merfyn Jones were leaving after a damning report.” (News report at the time)

Mary Burrows (BCUHB Chief Exec. 2008 – Jan. 2014), prior to being removed from her post, here admitting her own failure and that of her Health Board,;-

“My professional view is that in the autumn of 2011 with increasing concerns about achieving financial balance for 2011/12, the late budget setting for 2012/13 and

further concerns about financial balance, reinforced by Officials, the Board's direction turned to achieving financial balance to the extent that it outweighed the clinical safety, access, quality issue, governance and reconfiguration that were being raised. As the Accountable Officer I accept my duty in achieving finance balance, but I would not do that at all costs to safety and I made that clear. If this meant that my Accountable Officer status would be removed and thus unable to operate as a Chief Executive, then that was the price to pay.”

What is totally unacceptable as far as the Welsh Uplands are concerned, is that all her successors as Chief Executives – David Purt, Simon Dean and now Gary Doherty – have readily adopted her mistakes and still rely on the same old arguments, same old excuses and untruths.

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3. **Misleading and false statements made by BCUHB personnel**

(i) Statement by a **BCUHB representative** during a Localities consultation session in Porthmadog Leisure Centre on **29 Feb. 2012**

“Services should be in place before other services are withdrawn.”

This never happened in Ffestiniog and the Welsh Uplands. In fact, such services were not in place 12 months later, prior to the rushed closure of the Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital on **26th March 2013**, nor 12 months after that, either. **It is now 2017 and those services are still not “in place”!**

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(ii) Chief Exec. Mary Burrows **February 2013**

*‘Due to staff absence through illness, **the Minor Injuries Unit at the Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital will be closed for a period of 4 weeks, in order to safeguard patient safety.**’*

“The Minor Injuries Unit at the Hospital remains closed because of ongoing staff sickness The number of beds provided at the Hospital has been maintained at a level of 10 beds. The nursing staff available is insufficient to cover 12 beds, given the level of need of patients’

These were **totally misleading statements** that could only have been intended to deceive, since the BCUHB had already voted unanimously, **three weeks earlier** on **18th January 2013** to close the hospital. Six weeks later, on **26th March 2013**, the hospital's inpatients were moved by ambulances to Ysbyty Alltwen and work soon began on stripping the building of its assets.

The rushed closure, **before any services were put in place**, was an obvious attempt to pre-empt further local protest.

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(iii) **22 Feb. 2014** Dr Peter Higson (BCUHB Chair) referred to
“... *the proposed development in the town which brings a number of extra services to the whole population.*”

“*The Building will house primary care services, and an increased range of health and social care services.*”

The underlined clauses were **totally misleading**, as can easily be proved.

“*Services will be closer to home, preventing the need to travel*”

Again **untrue**, at least as far as Blaenau Ffestiniog and the Welsh Uplands are concerned.

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(iv) **January 2017** **Gary Doherty** (Current Chief Exec BCUHB) in a statement to the Petitions Committee) –

“*The surgery in Blaenau is fully manned by doctors, most of whom have a regular commitment to the practice, some of whom have salaried posts and are not simply locums.*’

NOT TRUE. The **only** salaried post, as Mr Doherty well knows, is that held by Dr Tom Parry, previously a full partner in the Blaenau Practice, who was persuaded back from retirement to serve on a part-time basis. To claim that the surgery is ‘fully manned’ is also misleading because there have been days with only **ONE** doctor present.

“*Full Minor Injuries services are provided by the practice in Blaenau during surgery hours*’

NOT TRUE, as Mr Doherty again well knows.

*“ ... a clear perception that some individuals are constantly searching for examples of care ... **in order to generate political ammunition.**”*

This accusation by Mr Doherty in his January 2017 statement to the Petitions Committee is seen as a **SLUR** on Defence Committee Members. He needs to explain this fully and to name the individuals to whom he refers. Either that or offer a public apology.

*‘Blaenau Ffestiniog is clearly rural, ... with **41.5% of the Blaenau population living in small villages or isolated communities ...**’*

Such a statement shows either an **incredible ignorance** and a **total lack of geographical knowledge** of the area (Blaenau is still recognised as the third largest town in Gwynedd and sits directly on the A470) or else another cynical attempt by Mr Doherty to mislead the Petitions Committee. **He should be asked to explain which.**

‘There is no doubt that there are significant issues in Blaenau, it has higher rates of deprivation, poor diet, obesity and older people living alone than in other areas of Meirionnydd and approaches to delivering health and social care in Blaenau must recognise these issues.’

VERY TRUE. So why would the Health Board take essential services away rather than adding to what was previously here, as was done in Tywyn and Dolgellau? The **discrimination** is obvious.

4. **DISCRIMINATION** (arguably racial) against the Welsh Uplands

(a) **DAVID PURT** (BCUHB Chief Exec. 2014 -15)

“It was agreed that MIUs in Bryn Beryl and Tywyn would be maintained in recognition of the rural nature of the area; these services were maintained from 10.00 to 18.00, seven days a week during summer months and five days a week during winter months.”

“Minor Injuries Services will be provided at each of the “hubs” seven days a week. There will also be Minor Injuries Services provided at Bryn Beryl Hospital and Tywyn Community Hospital to meet holiday demands ...”

In other words, extra MIU cover is provided in Pwllheli and Tywyn during the tourist season whilst **NO** cover whatsoever is provided for the indigenous population of the Welsh Uplands. This can but be **PURE DISCRIMINATION**.

For whatever reason, Mr Purt was soon removed from his post.

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(b) SIMON DEAN (BCUHB Chief Exec 2015-16):-

‘...it is noted that Tywyn as a community is viewed as being more remote than Blaenau Ffestiniog. In terms of accessibility, the Welsh Index of Deprivation scores Blaenau fairly well as it benefits from a train line, bus routes and good roads. This was an important factor taken into account by the Welsh Government when approving the Tywyn Business Case and also by the Health Board in its discussions with the CHC culminating in the decision to retain the MIU in Tywyn.’

This was **FALSE INFORMATION** presented as **fact**, so as to **DISCRIMINATE** against the Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital and the Welsh Uplands! It is beyond belief that no one in **BCUHB - or even in Welsh Government!** - knows that Tywyn also has a train line, connecting the coastal belt to Birmingham and London Euston. Tywyn also has as efficient a bus service as anywhere in the Welsh Uplands. So who did provide this so-called **“important factor”** of false information to the Welsh Index of Deprivation, thus ensuring that one area received preferential treatment whilst another less affluent area was so obviously discriminated against? Can it be possible that the following information off the Internet had something to do with it? –

“Blaenau Ffestiniog is a historic mining town in Gwynedd, Wales. It has a population of 4,875 according to the 2011 census, which makes it the third largest town in Gwynedd unitary authority, behind Bangor and Caernarfon. Blaenau is one of few places where the Welsh language is commonly heard on the streets around the town.

Tywyn is a very anglicized town, with the majority of its population (52.8%) being born in England according to the 2011 UK census. Likewise, slightly more respondents claimed an English-only identity (35.0%) than a Welsh-only identity (33.7%).”

Simon Dean denied us an an explanation and soon he too was gone!

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5. Following the Board’s decision to close the Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital in January 2013, the following request was sent **several times** to the BCUHB Chair:-

“If no discrimination was shown, then can we ask how BCUHB set about comparing and measuring the service needs of different areas in north-west Wales. We were given to understand that such research would take place not only in Ffestiniog and the Uplands but also in the catchment areas of Tywyn, Dolgellau, Alltwen and Pwllheli hospitals. We therefore request a copy of each of those studies so as to witness the arguments for providing a better health service in the smaller but more anglicized coastal towns.”

We still await any form of response. Why would that be?

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**** We wish to stress that we don’t in any way object to Tywyn and Pwllheli being allowed to retain their hospitals and being given extra services but we are questioning why the indigenous population of Blaenau Ffestiniog and the Welsh Uplands does not merit the same level of care. Hopefully, Members of the Scrutiny Committee can get answers, where we have failed.**