C 96
Ymchwiliad i effaith Covid-19, a'r modd y mae'n cael ei reoli, ar iechyd a gofal cymdeithasol yng Nghymru
Inquiry into the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak, and its management, on health and social care in Wales
Ymateb gan Unigolyn
Response from an Individual

I work for NHS Cymru as an Occupational Therapist and contracted COVID in the first wave, having been redeployed from another department to work on the frontline.

I tested positive in April and after self-isolating, attempted to go back to work twice but was unable to manage, due to debilitating symptoms indicative of long-COVID.   Currently, my most troublesome symptoms are shortness of breath, severe fatigue, body aches and brain fog. I am about to attempt a third phased return to work, though do not feel fully recovered, and consequently am unable to return to a frontline setting where staff are so desperately needed. I am concerned about my capacity to return to full function at work, especially given the lack - in Wales - of timely investigation into what is causing my difficulties and offer appropriate treatment and rehabilitation.

I live alone and have difficulties undertaking household chores, as this leads to a relapse in symptoms; this has meant living in a house which has not been adequately cleaned for several months. Recently, I have had to rely on a friend to clean the house as I have been unable to manage myself.

Due to living in Wales I have not been able to access a Long COVID clinic like the ones being rolled out in England. I need specialist healthcare in order to get well, more than my GP is able to provide. It doesn't seem fair that treatment is being allocated in England and not in Wales.

My GP practice has been overall sympathetic, though I have found this has varied according to which Doctor I have spoken to. I was referred to secondary care three months after testing positive, have had some investigations, but no treatment and am on a waiting list to see a respiratory specialist, which is what I need the most. The current set up in Wales for people with long-COVID is inadequate, disjointed and a post-code lottery, whereas across England, dedicated multidisciplinary clinics are up and running providing one-stop diagnostic and rehabilitative services.

For 4 months of sick leave, I was in receipt of half then nil pay, as NHS Cymru were not prepared to provide staff who contracted COVID on the frontline with full-pay, as is the policy of NHS England.   I had to rely on family at this time to meet my outgoings. Though there has been a belated interim decision by my employer to reinstate full pay, this issue has not yet been resolved at a national level. I was informed in November that NHS Wales Employers and trade unions were about to begin partnership discussions on the issue of COVID-19 sick pay with a view to reaching an All Wales position and the outcome would be detailed here:

https://www.nhsconfed.org/regions-and-eu/welsh-nhs-confederation/nhs-wales-employers/covid19

I have been unable to locate any information regarding the outcome of these negotiations and I am concerned about potential future financial impact.

Although challenging, I love my job, having retrained later in life. I had no objection to being redeployed, both wanting to do my bit in the current pandemic and support my wonderful

colleagues, many of whom continue to struggle on the frontline.   However, the treatment I received regarding my pay situation has left me feeling let down and disappointed. I had to spend a lot of time trying to sort this out, so that I was able to pay for my mortgage, bills, food etc. I live alone. This has taken its toll on my health and prolonged my recovery - and hence my return to work.

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