

**COMMENTS OF PETITIONER RE CLOSURE OF BRONLLYS HOSPITAL STROKE UNIT**

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**The South East Powys Community has no confidence in it's CHC.**

The CHC claim that they have ticked every box in regard to the consultation process. Technically this is not the case as they created a consultation process which was all smoke and mirrors - and manipulated what they claimed to be 'public opinion' to support their case. Realising that they had the equivalent of a riot on their hands, they backtracked and redefined the consultation. However, by that time the waters had been muddied; the consultation process was three-quarters over; the public were totally confused; and in what can best be described as a Machiavellian process, the CHC attempted to 'correct their process' to ensure that they did not have egg all over their faces for their incompetence.

We believe that the way the CHC has behaved highlights that the CHC membership has lost its ability to be objective and present public opinion fairly. The citizens of South East Powys are left with the only option of ensuring the CHC will become be the subject of a **proposed vote of no-confidence** as a result of their disgraceful handling of this consultation.

**The South East Powys Community has no confidence in the Health Board.**

The Health Board claim that they have followed procedure and that their initial plans to close the Bronllys Stroke Unit should go ahead on the grounds that Stroke Services would be delivered cost effectively and safer at Brecon. The implication is that the Stroke Unit has been providing an 'unsafe' service for years at Bronllys. If this is the case, this is entirely contrary to other Health Board claims, and would be cause for serious alarm. It is a ridiculous argument.

There is also no evidence given that the move will be cost effective. To prove this, the Health Board would need to provide the public with the financial figures on which this vague statement is made. Where is the Strategic plan for Health Care Services in South East Powys? Where are the figures supporting it? To cap it off, in their public presentations, the Health Board have shown their incompetence in that they do not understand what a Vision or a Strategic Plan is, nor how to develop one.

Furthermore, a report by the Assembly's Public Accounts Committee dated only Tuesday 19th February 2013 has criticized Welsh health boards for failing to plan their budgets properly, claiming many were guilty of "unrealistic and over-ambitious" forecasts.

However, the Powys Health Board have also **now** said that **the only grounds** upon which the closure of the Stroke Unit could be stopped by this specific consultation is if the Stroke Unit closure and move to Brecon could be proven to be 'unsafe'. We contend that

proving that a proposal by a Health Board to be 'unsafe' would be impossible by the lay public, and as a criteria it is outrageous.

**So what was the point of the consultation?** The only conclusion is that it has been a box-ticking exercise - an inconvenient hoop that our politicians have engineered, in the name of democracy, for the Health Board to jump through. Or, to put it another way, a massive waste of public money and a blatant waste of citizens' time and resources.

### **The Politicians!**

Privately our politicians have voiced their opinion that they are powerless to intervene. The controlling political party hold all the cards. The Health Minister has directed the Health Boards to cut costs and re-vamp the entire system. The Health Minister and the Welsh Government can then hide behind the Welsh Health Boards who have free reign to implement piecemeal, unthought-through unpopular policies - namely stripping away the Health Services' ability to provide adequate health care to the Welsh public.

However what the politicians have missed is that the public are mindful to fully support a leadership role where it feels there is competence in policy proposals. The public generally are not just 'for motherhood and against sin', there maybe limited resources, but at present the people who are in charge of these resources do not appear to be competent. At present it appears to the public that the current batch of Health Board officials could not organise a proverbial piss-up in a brewery - worse still, they have no idea what demand there is for which drinks in any of their public houses, nor what the party will cost them. Only six days ago, the National Assembly's Public Accounts Committee announced that some health boards in Wales start each financial year without even a plan to break even! What more evidence is needed to conclude that these people are incompetent?

The question remains, do we have amongst our politicians the political will to sort out what appears to the public to be an unmitigated incompetent mess?

### **What happens when the Public warn and their warnings are ignored?**

At the meeting of the Powys Health Board at Talgarth Town Hall on Wednesday 20 February, the Chair, Mel Evans, said that there were lessons to be learnt from the Francis Report into the recent Mid-Staffordshire health tragedies. And, at that same meeting, our Health Board decided to ignore the overwhelming response of the Public in their recent consultation process. Against all Public advice and wishes, and despite

everything, they agreed to go ahead and remove the Stroke and Rehabilitation Service from Bronllys Community Hospital to Brecon Hospital in the Autumn of this year, regardless.

### So let us take a look at the Frances Report.

- 1 *Perhaps the most important point Mr Robert Francis QC stressed was that the voices of Patients and the Public had not been listened to by the authorities.*

So what have we here?

- Over 3,144 people said No to removal of services from Bronllys and Yes to it being rebuilt to meet South East Powys's growing elder health needs. That works out at nearly 30% of the community affected by the service. (We were unable to ask the other 70% in the time available.)
  - A further 87 people took the trouble to write in letters saying No to the move.
  - Of the 115 questionnaires returned and 20 further representations - ALL stated that in their opinion the Consultation Process itself was flawed.
  - 100% of our Town and Local Community Councils also expressed their opposition to the Health Board proposal.
- 2 *Mr Francis goes on to say that the bodies who are there to protect the interests of the public were not able to challenge the authorities. These organisations were poorly equipped to take them on and challenge their actions. And, when they did raise concerns, they again were not listened to.*
- The Community Health Council - our Patient 'watch dog' - against all of the evidence and opinion submitted to it by the Public and the Bronllys League of Friends - chose to throw it's towel in with the Health Board and against the Community. Is it not unexpected then that the furious Community are now proposing to have the CHC answer to a charge of 'no confidence'?
- 3 *Mr Francis said that the Clinical managers had lost contact with their patients putting their priorities above those of quality medical care. They had not considered the implications of their decisions in the long run on their patients.*
- Clinical concerns raised by the Public who have up to date knowledge asking for evidence from the Health Board have not been responded to.
  - Our own AM, William Powell, had to ask for reassurances from the Welsh government that the views of all staff involved could be given freely without fear of Health Board sanction.

- The issues of the extra pressure that will be put on Brecon Hospitals' existing services and it's lack of capacity to expand to meet future need has not been addressed properly.
- Any pretence that alternative services such as 'Hospice at Home' or 'Wards in the Community' can sustainably plug the gaps by asset stripping and then closing community Hospitals, are betraying our local communities and their carers.
- Expecting Private Nursing Homes to replace our NHS Community Hospital is not the answer. It has been shown that Private Homes actually generate increased need for NHS beds and it's not really in their financial interests to patch you up and send you home. Firstly they like to have your fees and then your very home in their coffers.

## Conclusion

We are not concerned with 'process' in this political issue, don't lets get stuck on it. We are concerned that decisions are being made piece-meal by incompetent civil servants who have been given no political leadership. The consultation process has failed the people and been shown to be irrelevant and frankly a waste of public money.

We wish to see a compelling political movement in place to develop a sensible Health care strategy for the existing and future healthcare needs of our local community. Bronllys has provided such a sensible service to our community for decades. As we get older, we rely on Bronllys to provide palliative care - fix us up and send us back into the community, and then to look after us in our final few days. Bit by bit our CHC and Health Board have chipped away at the viability of our hospital to provide this service and this because they have no leadership or vision.

Our only hope is you, our politicians - and only if you have the courage to lead a movement with a vision and passion equal to that of Aneurin Beavan's. Or do you wish to be the politicians who allowed Mid-Wales to become the rural equivalent of Mid-Staffordshire?

Michael Eccles

25 February 2013

**Petition - 3,144 signatures:**

*“We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to reject any attempt by the Powys Teaching Health Board to asset-strip the Bronllys Community hospital by closing or moving its Stroke Unit, nor by placing new services or service facilities for the region elsewhere and rather to instruct the Health Board to devise a strategy to build or re-build, improve and/or extend this NHS Hospital’s facilities, and services and resource expertise; and to retain and re-build this valuable community asset as a centre of excellence.*

*We further call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to instruct the Health Board to place Bronllys Hospital at the centre of its strategy for the provision of adult and older people’s health services in South East Powys for the next 50 years, and to release the necessary resources to make this happen.”*