

P-04-608 Inquiry into the Welsh NHS – Correspondence from the Petitioner to the Committee, 03.12.14.

Petitioner: PJ Vanston

Key Points:

- 1) Cost. An inquiry into the Welsh NHS would be affordable and would, I am sure, pay for itself many times over in the long run. (Might an independent cost analysis be commissioned by the Welsh Assembly government?)
- 2) Comparison. England has had the Keogh report (2013) on its health service – so why can't Wales have something similar (which could be called a 'review', rather than an 'inquiry', if preferred)? Don't the Welsh deserve the same level of transparency in their health service as those over the border?
- 3) Opinion. Most Welsh people seem to want an inquiry, based on all polls I have seen and anecdotal evidence. (But again, might an independent poll be commissioned by the Assembly?)
- 4) Nurses. An inquiry – with its honest, independent overview of the way things are, and recommendations for action – would surely be of benefit to all NHS staff who are always liable to be criticised for things out of their control because they are on the front line.
- 5) Patients. Again, an inquiry and its recommendations, if carried out, would surely be likely to save lives by improving hospital care, addressing ambulance response times and reducing unacceptably long waiting lists for urgent operations (e.g. heart procedures).

Detailed Explanation:

Firstly, many thanks for considering my petition today.

I would initially like to focus on the cost argument put forward by Mark Drakeford (in his letter to William Powell AM of 16 November 2014) that there is no need for ‘inquiries which would undoubtedly take resources away from direct patient care.’

I consider this much-touted ‘cost argument’ to be a herring as red as the Welsh dragon itself.

An inquiry would cost a reasonable amount of money – for a nation of three million people – and almost certainly pay for itself many times over in the long run, with all the improvements any recommended changes would lead to, not to mention the savings made in the NHS compensation budget.

Mr Drakeford also states that the majority of people ‘receive excellent care from the NHS in Wales and its caring, dedicated workforce’ and are ‘very satisfied with its overall experience.’

To my knowledge, nobody campaigning for an inquiry has ever argued anything else, or is against the NHS or its workforce. Indeed, my own father was a nurse in the NHS in the 1950s and 60s, and that ‘caring, dedicated workforce’ in Swansea saved my mother’s life in 2007 after she suffered a major heart attack. And, indeed, I was born on the NHS myself – and am moderately satisfied with the overall outcome so far...

I would like to see an inquiry into the NHS precisely *for* the sake of its staff, because their lives would be undoubtedly made better in the long run by improvements resulting from an inquiry’s recommendations, as would the lives of all patients and their families.

All polls I see – (and anecdotal evidence) – suggest more than two thirds of people here are in favour of holding an inquiry into the Welsh NHS – (considerably more than the majority enjoyed by the Assembly government,

it should be noted). Perhaps this is because they realise that, although their beloved NHS is good, it could be better, and they can see that it clearly does have issues in certain areas, with scandals uncovered on what seems like a monthly basis, and people dying needlessly (as I am sure will happen even more this winter, unfortunately). Would it not be better to have everything out in the open in a transparent manner, so everyone could know what was going on? An inquiry would do that.

The only people perhaps justified in fearing the findings of an inquiry are those – (and one or two may be politicians, perhaps) – who have been complacent, negligent, or even complicit, in the failings of the Welsh NHS.

Moreover, at present, the people of Wales are being treated like second class British citizens. In England, they had the Keogh report (2013) which has undoubtedly improved many aspects of the English NHS. The Welsh, meanwhile, are effectively being told to that they are being unreasonable when they ask for the same. Why? Is it not reasonable to seek honesty and transparency in one's own country in order to improve the health service for its own people? Again, if so, why?

A cynic might conclude that the 'idle overlings' who rule over us are often more concerned with their future political careers than in being honest with the Welsh people by allowing them to see what is happening in their own NHS by means of a full independent inquiry.

Incidentally, my petition for an NHS inquiry is in no way party political, no matter how politicians may choose to use it as a 'political football' – and I am not, and never have been, a member of any political party.

But, having said all this, I do understand how some NHS staff and members of the public may perceive a call for an inquiry as somehow an attack on NHS staff, or even the NHS itself. To those people I say this:

What would Nye Bevan have wanted?

Would he have wanted Welsh politicians telling the people they couldn't have an inquiry into the NHS they pay for because those politicians have decided, like some patrician aristocrats of old, that it is not in the people's best interests? I doubt it. I believe Nye Bevan would have realised that most of his compatriots both want and deserve an inquiry. And by goodness, if he were in charge of Wales, I am convinced we would have had such an inquiry two or three years ago and would now be enjoying the benefits of the recommendations it made and the action plans it put into force.

So, in summary, why have an inquiry into the Welsh NHS?

Why? Because we need one, we deserve one, and because it is the right thing to do for patients, NHS staff and the people of Wales.

And the bottom line is this:

If we don't have an inquiry, (or a review, an investigation, a powwow – or whatever anyone wants to call it), and carry on as we are, then more people will die unnecessarily in our hospitals and on long waiting lists – and for reasons we don't even know about yet, as we have not had the benefit of a full, independent inquiry to identify them.

Alternatively, if we do have such an inquiry, fewer people will die unnecessary deaths.

That, surely, is reason enough.

Many thanks for considering my petition today

(Mr) PJ Vanston

Swansea