

## *Pwyllgor Amddiffyn Ysbyty Coffa Ffestiniog*

Mr Mike Hedges AM  
Chair, Petitions Committee  
Welsh Assembly

Bryn Marian  
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February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2017

Dear Mr Hedges

**RE: Petition P-04-564 Restoration of Inpatient Beds, Minor Injuries Cover and X-Ray Unit to the Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital. – Re HIW Letter**

May we thank you and your Committee for obtaining responses from both Healthcare Inspectorate Wales and Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) to your enquiries regarding our petition. Both letters to you require a response from us since neither is satisfactory. This letter relates entirely to the letter to you from Dr Kate Chamberlain of HIW.

### [Referral to Healthcare Inspectorate Wales](#)

The primitive level of services in the Welsh Uplands that has existed since BCUHB withdrew a wide range of healthcare services from the area, has generated a substantial number of serious cases of patients' suffering. Following meetings with 8 AMs and with legal advisors in Cardiff in September 2016, our Defence Committee assembled and presented evidence of multiple cases of "Elder Abuse" as defined by the World Health Organisation. These multiple cases were presented to the Older People's Commissioner for Wales and discussed with her in a video conference in which the North Wales Community Health Council also participated.

The Older People's Commissioner decided to refer the matter to Healthcare Inspectorate Wales in a letter which included the following:

"The Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital Defence Committee are clearly of the view that the initial assessment and consultation that underpinned the development of the north Wales plan is fundamentally flawed. They also however clearly hold the view that the current level of healthcare provision constitutes elder abuse. I have attached their evidence base for this, and confirmed with them that they are happy for me to share this with you.

As this contains very serious allegations relating to the experiences of older people accessing healthcare in that region, I am passing this to you as the Regulator and Inspector of healthcare to act upon."

On 15 January 2013, before BCUHB made the decision to withdraw services from the Welsh Uplands, the Executive of the Local Medical Committee of North Wales, the statutory body representing the voice of General Practice across North Wales, wrote to each member of the Board individually.

"We reject any of the current proposals that involve closure of Community Hospital beds in North Wales, without prior thought regarding the impact of such change. There has been no convincing argument put forward that such closures will improve patient care, it seems to be being proposed as purely a cost cutting exercise.

We feel that the overall number of beds in the system is too small to deliver the service that the population is encouraged to expect, from a National Health Service, by their political leaders.

**We do not accept** that Minor Injury units, their associated X-ray or Out Patient departments **can be closed in our more rural communities without significant hardship being inflicted on those communities.** The nurses running these units also have other roles, as they are senior members of staff who run outlying specialist clinics.

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This service review process has taken thousands of manpower hours to come to its conclusions. The conclusions of this process are not supported by Primary Care and we urge you to reject its conclusions”

Subsequent events in the affected areas such as the Welsh Uplands have confirmed the accuracy of the North Wales GPs’ professional warning.

### HIW Action

The response of HIW to the Older People’s Commissioners referral has been more than disappointing. We question the level of professionalism that HIW has applied. Ten weeks after receiving a referral of service provision causing Elder Abuse, Dr Chamberlain writes to you, “I cannot provide a comprehensive view of the quality of health care in the Blaenau Ffestiniog area, as we have not inspected all of the services in the locality.” There is no indication as to when, if ever, HIW will examine the very serious complaint that has been referred to them by the Older People’s Commissioner.

Dr Chamberlain rejected two offers by members of this Defence Committee to meet with her team. One letter said,

“It seems sensible to offer to you and your investigation staff the opportunity to explore the examples in more depth with us and to seek further detail where that is felt desirable. We are perfectly prepared to visit Merthyr at an early date. Perhaps you would let me know whether such a meeting would be agreeable to you.”

Dr Chamberlain however records that HIW received “a comprehensive response” from BCUHB from which it concluded that HIW is “broadly assured that the health board has taken and is continuing to take appropriate steps in ensuring that the services it provides in the Ffestiniog area are adequate.”

Dr Chamberlain qualifies her letter with caveats about the challenges BCUHB faces. Dr Chamberlain will be aware that her Inspectorate has been inspecting Community Hospitals in the BCUHB area and is due to report publically in late February. We would have hoped that she would be comparing the health service provided to residents in areas with community hospitals to that provided in the Welsh Uplands where BCUHB has closed the hospital and hence have been able to provide you with better targeted observations than in her letter.

In explicable, Dr Chamberlain has not shared the “comprehensive response” she received from BCUHB with the Defence Committee which registered the original complaint. It is regrettable that Dr Chamberlain has not shared with us her correspondence with BCUBH. Secrecy is totally inappropriate when “Elder Abuse” alleged.

We reiterate, the residents of the Welsh Uplands do not consider that the services in their rural area “are adequate”.

We have written to the Older People’s Commissioner to ask for a copy of all correspondence between her office and HIW on this issue and any conclusions that she may have drawn. Your Committee may wish to ask the Older People’s Commissioner some similar questions.

We conclude by reiterating that we have not found the HIW involvement in any way gives residents of the Welsh Uplands confidence that the primitive level of healthcare service they are now experiencing is likely to substantially improve and the request from our original petition to your Committee stands. Our petition to you was supported by a formal community poll in which 52% of the population turned out and voted, almost unanimously, for the return of services the absence of which were already causing deep pain to many of our residents.

With grateful thanks for your Committee’s support,

For Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital Defence Committee,

Evan G Williams

Secretary