

Vaughan Gething AC/AM  
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Iechyd a Gwasanaethau  
Cymdeithasol  
Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Services



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Our ref VG/01997/18

David John Rowlands AM  
Chair - Petitions Committee.  
National Assembly for Wales  
Cardiff Bay  
CF99 1NA  
[SeneddPetitions@Assembly.Wales](mailto:SeneddPetitions@Assembly.Wales)

27 June 2018

Dear David,

Thank you for your letter of 11 June on behalf of the Petitions Committee concerning Petition P-05-784: Prescription drug dependence and withdrawal - recognition and support.

I shall respond to the specific points you have highlighted:

- ***How the Committee, and the evidence gathered to date on this subject, could support the development of the Substance Misuse Treatment Framework***

The purpose of the Substance Misuse Treatment Frameworks is to assist in the commissioning, development and delivery of treatment services based upon robust evidence and need. As you note, a specific action in our Substance Misuse Delivery Plan 2016-18 is to develop a Substance Misuse Treatment Framework (SMTF) focusing specifically on prescription only medicines and over the counter medicines. In order to do this, my officials have commissioned research with the University of South Wales to collate the necessary evidence. This research is about to commence as ethical approval has now been received. We expect this research to be completed in the Autumn and will be used to inform the development of the Framework. We welcome the evidence provided by the Committee and will ensure that it is considered in the development of the Framework.

- ***Whether there will be an opportunity for people affected by these issues to help inform the Framework***

Ultimately, it is the Welsh Ministers who are legally responsible for the provision of health care, including substance misuse treatments in Wales under sections 1 and 2 of the National Health Service (Wales) Act 2006. However, substance misuse service users should be involved at every level of the development, delivery and review of substance misuse services in order to:

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

1. Comply with section 183 of the National Health Service (Wales) Act 2006 and the statutory duty placed on Local Health Boards to involve patients in planning and decision making processes;
2. Ensure that substance misuse services are developed to meet the needs of service users;
3. Ensure that substance misuse services provided are of a good quality; and
4. Ensure the delivery of positive treatment outcomes for the individuals.

In relation to the Framework, people will have the opportunity to inform it in a number of ways. The purpose of carrying out qualitative research prior to developing the Framework is to gain insight from those who are affected by these issues. As part of the research with the University of South Wales, semi structured interviews will be carried out across Wales within the criminal justice sector and in community settings to enable a wide range of views to be collated and evaluated. Furthermore, the Framework will be subject to consultation so people will be able to give their views through that process.

- ***Your response to the suggestion that some health boards would benefit from further discussion with, or information from, other boards and the Welsh Government over what can be done to improve the way issues relating to prescription medication dependence and withdrawal are addressed***

The seven Area Planning Boards (APBs) covering Wales have the responsibility for commissioning services to meet local needs within their regions. Each board includes senior representatives from a range of organisations including, Local Health Boards, Public Health, Police and Local Authorities who co-ordinate services within the region. In addition, the Welsh Government facilitates regular meetings between all seven areas to monitor progress against the Substance Misuse strategy, share good practice and performance.

APBs also have working arrangements in place with Local Mental Health Partnership Boards (LMHPBs) which would be able to facilitate collaborative working. They are free to have these conversations with other boards and Welsh Government as they see fit.

- ***Whether you support, or will consider further, the possibilities for developing:***
  - a. ***Specialist support services for prescribed drug dependence accessible across Wales;***

Our seven Substance Misuse Area Planning Boards (APBs) are responsible for commissioning and delivering all local substance misuse services across Wales and this includes supporting those who are dependent on a range of drugs. APBs will commission services based on the identified need in their areas. Although the service may vary slightly throughout Wales, there is access to advice and support and I expect health boards to ensure that these services are fit for purpose wherever a patient may reside.

- b. ***A national 24 hour helpline and online portal for people experiencing dependence on, or withdrawal from, prescription medications;***

Our national drug and alcohol helpline, DAN 24/7, is equipped to provide advice, information and local points of contact for further support to anyone who feels they need further support or guidance. In addition, we are soon to launch a new harm reduction website in Wales. This website will have information on a wide range of subjects, of which this will be one.

***c. Updated guidance for health boards, professionals and patients;***

When developed, the Substance Misuse Treatment Framework will provide advice and guidance. In addition, following the research my officials will be working with Public Health Wales to discuss the possible development of an e learning module to be placed on the learning portal within the new harm reduction website. There are also clear guidelines in place from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) for the prescribing of antidepressant drugs and the treatment of depression.

The Clinical Guidelines on Drug Misuse and Dependence Update (2017) states that local commissioners and providers need to work together to ensure drug treatment systems are available to meet the changing needs of local drug-misusing populations. Many drug misusers have a myriad of health and social problems, which require interventions from a range of providers. Therefore, joint working across health and social care and between hospital, prison, primary care and community drug services is a key feature of effective treatment partnerships. It is seldom the case that one clinician or provider will be able to meet these needs in isolation.

In addition, comprehensive guidance on the prescribing and monitoring of hypnotics and anxiolytics, including benzodiazepines, were published by the All Wales Medicines Strategy Group in 2011 and updated in 2016.

***d. A national prescribing indicator to support clinical decision-making;***

My officials will investigate the scope and need for any further guidance over and above that already published by NICE and the degree to which a national prescribing indicator might support clinical decision-making.

***e. Focused education and training about this issue for healthcare professionals.***

Our new harm reduction website will contain an accredited training portal where professionals and lay people can access e-learning on a range of subjects to ensure continual professional development. As highlighted earlier my officials will be working with Public Health Wales to discuss the possible development of an e learning module on this subject.

- ***The Welsh Government's view on whether antidepressants have the same potential for dependency and harm as other prescription drugs already recognised in this regard***

The misuse of prescription-only and over the counter medicines causes serious health problems for some. Misuse can include situations where there may have been poor prescribing practices that may have led to dependency or other problems, as well as use for which the medication was not originally intended.

- ***How the Welsh Government could support the collection of robust data on the scale of problems relating to dependence on, and withdrawal from, prescription medications***

My officials are currently looking at the data we collect through our Welsh National Database for Substance Misuse and consideration will be given as to what could be collected in this area.

- ***As referred to above, an update on investigations into the need for further guidance in this area, and whether a national prescribing indicator might support clinical decision-making***

Please see the responses above.

I hope this is helpful to the Committee.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vaughan Gething". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'V'.

**Vaughan Gething AC/AM**

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Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Services