



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Eluned Morgan MS
Minister for Health and Social Services
Welsh Government
5th Floor, Tŷ Hywel
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

10th January 2022

Dear Eluned,

RE: Inquiry into the management of health services in North Wales

We are all living through an unprecedented period during which health services across the United Kingdom have been put under immense strain – something I know first-hand having returned to frontline nursing at the Wrexham Maelor Hospital. However, I, and many of my constituents, are increasingly concerned about the management of the health services in Wales and, in particular, in North Wales. Health is, by quite a margin, the number one issue in my inbox, despite us being two years into the pandemic, which has given time for measures to be put in place.

As you know, in North Wales the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) was placed into special measures in 2015. The Welsh Government then took BCHUB out of special measures in November 2020, a decision that was met with concern from many.

Arguably, this concern has proved to be well-founded as health services and access have not improved across the region since November 2020. As of August 2021, there were 138,964 people waiting for treatment across BCUHB, compared with 102,629 in August 2019 and, over the same period, the proportion waiting 36 weeks or more went up from 10 per cent to 39 per cent.

Waiting times at A&E have also increased. In November 2021, BCUHB was the worst performing region for A&E waiting times in Wales, with only 62 per cent of attendees seen within four hours. Within the region, the Wrexham Maelor was the worst performing hospital: only 42 per cent of patients were seen within four hours and only 76 per cent were seen within twelve.

In comparison, in England, 74 per cent of patients were seen within four hours throughout last November. This is a stark reminder of the health disparities my constituents face, so close to the border with England.

I have heard many dreadful cases from my constituents that highlight the scale of the problem. Recently, one Wrexham resident spent 18 hours in A&E at the Wrexham Maelor Hospital having been sent there by their GP with a suspected blood clot in the chest. My constituent was advised not to leave A&E for fear of serious illness, but still waited 18 hours to be seen. Another resident was told by staff at the Wrexham Maelor Hospital to drive to the Minor Injury Unit at Oswestry, nearly 15 miles away, for treatment because the Maelor could not accommodate them. This was despite the introduction of an Urgent Primary Care Centre, set up to deal with such cases.

Many are also concerned about access to GPs. There is an ongoing campaign to oppose the closure of the Gresford surgery, part of the Alyn Family Practice, and patients of Hillcrest Medical Centre routinely contact me about their inability to access their GP. One constituent told me that they “dread... being ill enough to require medical help” from their GP surgery as “waits of up to two hours on hold for an answer are the norm.” We are now at a point where people are choosing not to live in Wrexham, or are planning to move from Wrexham, due to inadequate primary health care. The bottom line is that residents lack confidence in local health services.

I understand that the Covid-19 pandemic is putting continued strain on healthcare services across the country, including in North Wales, and I appreciate that the Welsh Government has announced £1.3bn of additional funding for the NHS in Wales over the next three years to support services. However, the current situation – which is fundamentally letting my constituents down – cannot go on.

Therefore, since healthcare is a devolved matter, I am urging the Welsh Government to take immediate action and launch an inquiry into the management of health care services across North Wales and Wrexham so that residents can feel confidence in their healthcare.

An inquiry is vital so that the Welsh Government and the health board can understand where mistakes are being made and, crucially, it will give patients the confidence that the Welsh Government is listening to their concerns.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sarah Atherton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Sarah Atherton MP
Member of Parliament for Wrexham