

P-06-1350 reopen Dyfi Ward at Tywyn Hospital now

The health board do not have a date for the reopening of the inpatient ward at Tywyn Hospital. The beginning of April 2024 will be a whole year since the health board formally closed the ward. This is the third reply to the Petitions Committee by Tywyn Hospital Action Group. This reply focuses on: the evidence the group has obtained for the reasons why the inpatients ward at Tywyn Hospital was closed; the matter of the board withdrawing the right for public questions to be asked at the health board's general meetings and those answers which have finally been provided to the questions asked of the board in November; the lack of communication of the progress Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) have made in reopening the ward.

BCUHBs own documents show that in February 2023 they were considering the closure of the inpatients ward at Tywyn Hospital, due to staffing shortages which had been ongoing for years. At that stage the documents show that the board were comparing Dolgellau and Tywyn Hospitals and considering the reasons for keeping one open over the other. The health board chose to close the inpatients ward at Tywyn Hospital, but to keep the inpatients ward open at Dolgellau. A key factor repeatedly cited to the general public was that there were more beds available at Dolgellau:

In April this year the decision to consolidate ward staff on the Dolgellau site was based on the ability to maximise the number of beds for the south Meirionnydd area. The Dolgellau site provides the biggest inpatient bed capacity, currently at 18 beds with an option for further increase in bed numbers. The maximum number possible in Tywyn would be 16 beds, thus the Dolgellau option provided the better option in terms of maximising bed capacity and mitigating the overall risk of the reduction of beds due to the temporary loss of bed capacity in Tywyn. (answer from BCUHB - Public Questions pre-submitted to Health Board 28 September 2023).

Evidence from the board's own documents from the 20/2/23 'Executive Summary' show that in fact only an equal number of beds were ever considered at both hospitals, that is 15, and that only 11 beds were open at each hospital, having been reduced over the years due to funding and staffing problems; '...option A and option B offer a total of 15 beds, this would be a reduction of six compared to the current 22 (11 per site)'. Facilities at Tywyn Hospital were brand new and up to date; the public meeting in November 2023 refers to 'the pioneering work of the late Morgan Vaughan, a renowned councillor from Tywyn, who fought tirelessly for millions to be raised and spent on the hospital to be refurbished and extended, which was opened in 2016'; whereas facilities at Dolgellau Hospital are very outdated. Note Tywyn Hospital also has capacity to further increase the number of beds.

As stated in our last reply to the petitions committee 'factors we see that the board looked at were availability of doctors, the distance to and from where staff would have to travel, which of the board's own main hospitals would be affected (Ysbyty Gwynedd Bangor and Wrexham Maelor), the political impact, and the fact that patients being returned to Tywyn come from Bronglais, Abersytwyth, which is in a different health board' (Hywel Dda). Tywyn is not within BCUHB's catchment, and therefore does not alleviate bed blocking in the health board's own hospitals.

As stated previously, 'no real analysis or references to matters on the effects impacting actual patients were considered' regarding the closure, neither does Ms Shillabeer's latest reply refer to the impact on patients, relatives or on the health service provided for the Tywyn area. The impact of closing the ward for patients and relatives is a cause of severe upset and concern. In Tywyn we have elderly relatives of patients in Dolgellau Hospital, who are unable to use public transport, who have been paying for private taxis to visit their loved ones in Dolgellau. This is only one tragic example of

the impact of this closure and almost a year since the excellent facilities available in Tywyn were closed.

On 28/04/23 BCUHB notes *'Enhanced Services Action Plan'* show that *'End of life and hospice care to be considered as an option for beds at Tywyn Hospital, and 28/04/23 - to discuss Hospice Dewi Sant and Marie Curie Service in the area to follow up on previous conversations, status in progress'*. No more information or details have been provided or any of the *'previous conversations'* shared with the public, but shows that BCUHB had been considering other plans for our hospital. Ulterior plans that the health board have for Tywyn Hospital need to be made public. Considerable funding from donations was provided to enable the hospital to be refurbished, and the hospital is part of the public health service meeting the needs of all the people of Tywyn and surrounding areas. Additionally, the appropriate use and management of donations is a serious concern, because in March 2023, only a few weeks before it's closure, over £10,000 from the Tywyn Hospital donations fund was authorised to pay for an updated patient kitchen for the inpatients ward, when in February 2023, the health board had begun planning its closure.

The matter of the public now being prevented from asking questions of the health board, the previous *'public questions'* for which answers were recorded in the public domain on the board's website, to be accessed at any time by anyone, remains a serious issue and we trust that the Petitions Committee is able to question the veracity of this action. BCUHBs website now says *'we welcome questions from the public at any time which will be answered on an individual basis'*; this approach not only lacks transparency, it obstructs the right of individuals to question the board within an open forum. When questions were asked, last November, the board then took 2 months to answer. There is no facility or method for tracking whether or how the board answers the questions honestly and with integrity on an individual basis such as they are now supposedly doing. In fact, although it was a useful vehicle for opening up the issues, disappointingly and far too often, the answers to the questions lacked the sincerity, accuracy and honesty expected. Nevertheless, this opportunity for openness and accountability of BCUHB has now been closed down.

BCUHBs response to the questions asked at the meeting of 30/11/23 have now been provided and here are our comments:

Regarding the matter of staffing, the health board have stated that they have finally deployed two international nurses to Tywyn, and that the nurses are undergoing the training required to work at Tywyn Hospital. Meanwhile four international nurses have been employed at Dolgellau Hospital. The board was asked how many international nurses have been employed to the board's facilities in total in 2023, but the answer only included numbers in *'the Community'*. Ms Shillabeer's letter to the petitions committee maintains that there are still insufficient numbers of staff to reopen the ward. The board continually change the number of vacancies and bandings of nurses they say are required to reopen the inpatients ward at Tywyn; for instance, in July 2023, in answer to a question to the board, the answer was stated as *'3 WTE Band 5 nurses short of the required number'*. By now, the number and levels of vacancies have changed yet again. Adverts are erratic; in answer to one of the latest questions, where BCUHB had stated that posts were being advertised at the Race the Train event in Tywyn, the board now states that *'...there were no live adverts for the vacant posts on 18/9/23 but there were shortly afterwards'* – which was actually *'October 2023'*. The board continues to prevaricate on answers to questions about *'adverts, sharing flyers, posters and banners'* - there is

no evidence to support anecdotal statements such as *'numerous leaflets and posters have been distributed in the Tywyn area'*. BCUHB continually tell us how they can't open the ward; they do not tell us how and when they will open it.

The original question of the board on 28/9/23 about the loss of health services in Dolgellau and Tywyn between 2017 and 2023 and asking for a full response has taken almost 4 months to be answered. However, the board's answer to question 10 says *'please see attachment with details/notes'* – this is missing. The answer states that two services are no longer operational. One is the general surgery clinic provided by Hywel Dda; no explanation of if that service will be reinstated is given. Out of hours is the other service that has been withdrawn from our locality, and the board states that a new *'service model'* operates from Ysbyty Alltwen, Tremadoc, (over an hour's drive away), or Bangor, (which is almost two hours drive away). The health board have noticed that telemedicine clinics are missing from Tywyn and are now reminding their own services to provide these clinics, but do not give any dates or real detail of when or how these will be put in place. The other services lost from 2017, detailed in the original chart we provided, have not been mentioned. *'New service developments'* referred to in their reply, that is *'Tuag Adref'* and a *'treatment room'*, do not mitigate against the closure of the inpatients ward or the closure of other services. Tuag Adref is no substitution for an inpatients ward, and a treatment room which is only open during the day, is certainly no substitution for the GP out of hours service or 24 hour onsite medical service, all provided in 2017.

BCUHB documents show that they contacted the Welsh Government about the closure of the ward, and yet Eluned Morgan, the Minister for Health and Social Services department states in a reply to the group of 15/6/23 that *'We can therefore confirm that the Minister for Health and Social Services played no role in the decision in regard to the temporary closure at Tywyn Hospital. We have however contacted the health board and we have been assured this decision is for inpatient services only and was made due to the significant staffing challenges being experienced and, ultimately, to ensure those needing inpatient hospital care can continue to receive the care they need in a safe clinical environment. The health board has also confirmed that the other services provided at Tywyn Hospital will continue to run as usual.'* The Welsh Government uncritically reiterate what BCUHB tell them.

Communication by the health board with the public about improvements and progress regarding health services in Tywyn has remained poor. For example, still no feedback is being circulated publicly from the meetings between the health board, councillors and MEP/MP about staffing or any other developments if they are still going ahead. Only through asking questions do we ever receive information. There is no proactive approach to sharing information, and yet the board has said:

In answering our question on 25/05/23 on steps being taken to restore public confidence in the health board following the mishandling of the closure of Dyfi ward, the board replied: 'we work with the local population to understand the health service needs for Tywyn and the surrounding area'.....'regular communication and mutual support from partners including the public will be required moving forwards to ensure the right service and service models are provided'.....'we will be looking to extend the scope of and membership of (these) meetings as we progress to include the patient voice through patient representative options to the future'.....and the health board 'are keen to see ...trust restored through continued communication'. (answer from BCUHB - Public Questions pre-submitted to Health Board 31 July 2023).

The group has endeavoured to demonstrate in our replies to the Petitions Committee how BCUHB have mismanaged our facilities and health service. There is no reinforcement of the standards and attitudes required and the continued obfuscation is a serious matter of concern. One year on, the health board do not have the aptitude to reopen the inpatients ward again.

As stated in our previous reply 'BCUHB need to be accountable for the decisions they make on providing healthcare in the Tywyn area. We trust that the petitions committee appreciates the legitimacy of our campaign and uses its influence to ensure that our health services are reinstated to a high standard. We have a right to an efficient and effective health service, which puts patients first'.

Yours sincerely

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