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Petitions Committee

Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay, Cardiff

27 August 2020

Petition P-05-914 Equal Access to Health Care for the Disabled

BMA Cymru Wales submission

BMA Cymru Wales would like the opportunity to provide information and details to the Committee to assist them during their consideration of Petition P-05-914 Equal Access to Health Care for the Disabled.

We note that the petitions calls on Welsh Government to make it a legal requirement for all GP surgeries to “have wide, adjustable treatment beds and hoists available for the use of disabled patients, so that they can be examined whenever there is need.

The BMA’s Welsh GP Committee understand the petitioner’s frustration and the difficult situation that attending a GP surgery without the appropriate adaptations can have. We believe that all patients should have the opportunity to access appropriate health services and support, no matter where they live.

We do not however feel that putting a legal requirement in place for all GP surgeries to have all potential adaptations is appropriate for either patients or GP surgeries. Such a process would be extremely costly and would result in GP surgeries needing to be much larger so as to appropriately accommodate all types of equipment. With increasing services being delivered in GP practices and a greater proportion of healthcare training being done in surgeries, space is already at a premium. We are mindful that such an approach would also result in many adaptations and pieces of equipment being unused in many locations.

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Additionally, in the interest of patient safety, it is important to consider that, in the case of hoists, each hoist is patient specific. Both the patient and staff require training in how to safely use and work with the hoist so that the patient is kept safe at all times during use.

The petition however shines a light on some important aspects of patient safety and equality that should not be ignored.

It remains the responsibility of each Health Board to plan for how services will be delivered for patients in their area. This includes adaptations and specialist equipment that is required for patients and the funding to support this. As Health Boards have a wider remit than GP surgeries, as part of their wider planning measures, they may wish to consider how to balance accessibility and access across the footprint of a primary care cluster.

Therefore a discussion regarding the types of adaptations and equipment that are needed to support patients, including those like the petitioner, is required between Welsh Government and health boards along with patient representative groups and groups that represent to voice of doctors in Wales.

Only when these discussions are carried out and appropriate funding made available from Welsh Government to support the outcomes will all patients across Wales have equal opportunity to access health services in their local area that are appropriate to them and their individual requirements.

In support of the spirit of Petition P-05-914 Equal Access to Health Care for the Disabled, BMA Cymru Wales recommends that the Committee recommends that Welsh Government instigate these discussions.