



Ein cyf/Our ref VG/01912/20

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21 April 2020

Dear Mair,

Thank you for your letter of 2 April outlining your concerns about the impact of Covid-19 on mental health services and service users with more serious mental illness.

As you will understand, these are unprecedented circumstances and we have taken a number of steps to support health boards to free up capacity and resources to respond to the immediate pressures of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, I can assure you that the Welsh Government is clear that a level of mental health support must be maintained and I can confirm that the Chief Executive of NHS Wales, Dr Andrew Goodall, wrote to all health boards on 14 April to set out our expectations for the continued delivery of mental health services during the period of the pandemic. Whilst there will be an impact on mental health services, as there will be with all critical services, I do expect continuity plans to ensure safe and sustainable mental health support which recognises the relevant legal safeguards and requirements.

To support this, and to ensure that we maintain oversight of mental health services capacity and capability during this period, we have established a Welsh Government/NHS Mental Health Incident Group which is currently meeting on a twice weekly basis and includes Social Care Wales, Health Inspectorate Wales and Care Inspectorate Wales. Under the aegis of this national group officials are working closely with health boards to enable them to highlight issues and concerns in a systematic way. Health boards have also established Covid-19 mental health leads who meet with my officials on a weekly basis to provide assurance on service continuity and to escalate issues of concern so that these can be dealt with at pace. Added to these arrangements for mental health statutory services my officials have also put in place weekly meetings with the Wales Alliance for Mental Health so that any concerns or queries can be escalated and dealt with quickly throughout this period.

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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.

In relation to the specific concerns you have raised regarding early discharge and closure of in-patients units, I can confirm that in-patient units remain open. Where appropriate and safe, patients have been supported to be cared for in the community in line with normal practice. We are not aware of any unsafe discharges and continue to receive assurance from health boards that this remains the case.

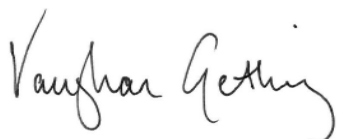
You also raised concerns regarding Community Mental Health Teams and whilst I am aware that as part of the response to Covid-19 some community services have been consolidated, my expectation is that this is to ensure services can be sustained even with a potential reduction in staffing, and not to diminish or reduce the local support.

On the issues that you have raised regarding the immune-suppression effects of Clozapine and potential Covid-19 risk for patients, I understand that my officials wrote to Hafal's Chief Executive on 31 March to respond to these concerns. In terms of access to Clozapine clinics, health boards have provided assurance that all patients who require access to clozapine are receiving it.

Whilst I recognise that all critical services will be impacted in some way by the pandemic, I hope I have provided you with reassurance that mental health services have been positioned as key services to be maintained during this time. However, if you are aware of any specific circumstances where you have concerns about the safety of care being provided, I would encourage you to raise that concern with the appropriate health board as a matter of urgency. I would expect the health board to provide a thorough and satisfactory response to your concerns.

I welcome Hafal's support and the continued engagement with the weekly meetings that officials have established with the Wales Alliance for Mental Health to co-ordinate our efforts to support services users during this challenging period. These weekly meetings also the most appropriate mechanism for Hafal to raise, and to receive timely responses, to any future concerns during this period.

Yours sincerely,

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

Vaughan Gething AC/AM

Y Gweinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Minister for Health and Social Services