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WALES EQUALITY ALLIANCE

OPEN LETTER TO WELSH GOVERNMENT ON WELSH GENDER TEAM CLINIC

15/05/2019

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Dear Mr Gething,

The new Welsh Gender Team clinic, forming part of the new All Wales Gender Identity Service for Adults (CP182 Specification and Policy), failed to open in April 2019. This contravenes the letter of direction from Dr Andrew Goodhall, Chief Executive, NHS Wales, and threatens to undermine the commitment pledged by Welsh Government to ensure good clinical care for Transgender and Non-Binary (Trans) patients in Wales. Not only are there delays, we also feel strongly that Cardiff and Vale UHB and WHSCC have signed off on a clinic proposal that is not fit for purpose.

The individual responsible is Professor Steve Davies, who took up the role of clinical lead in 2018. He is a highly controversial figure for many Trans patients and does not enjoy the wholehearted support of the community with a number describing their own experiences under his care as unhelpful or problematic. Indeed, scores of patients were left stranded in Cardiff and Vale for a number of years without safe access to hormone treatment until an intervention in October 2018 by Welsh Government to provide a locum GP.

We understand from community stake holder members of the All Wales Gender Identity Partnership Group (AWGIPG), that Professor Davies has not been formally interviewed for his position within the Welsh Gender Service. We are unclear as to what experience he has in the area of gender clinic work, and to this end, has evaded accountability.

We understand from the former Medical Director, that Professor Davies is yet to successfully recruit any trained gender clinicians. He appears to ignore guidance from AWGIPG regarding the service model and taken an approach which is contrary to current best practice, seeking to employ psychiatrists to plug the workforce gap. These psychiatrists are renowned for pathologising practices and, without appropriate training, lack the requisite skills for a gender clinician role. This will take Trans patients in Wales back to the 1970s and risks causing significant harm.

Hundreds of Welsh Trans patients are on 2 year waiting lists at the London GIC. Those who were referred after August 2017 have been repatriated to the new service, but this has not been delivered and still the referrals grow. There is no information available about what happens to these patients and how waiting lists are to be affected. Currently, the evidence points to Welsh patients being lined up to receive a service that is inferior to that of the London GIC with waiting times likely to be greater than those currently on the existing system given the absence of trained staff. This is in direct conflict with one of the core goals of the new CP182 Protocol. Patients can wait up to 3 years after initial GP presentation before being seen by a gender clinician. During this time, their mental health and well-being can deteriorate significantly with some cases resulting in suicide. This situation reveals a complete lack of regard for prioritising waiting times, and Welsh Trans patients are once again in limbo.

It is not acceptable to put patients at risk because of sloppy planning, poor levels of training and a fixation on old fashioned and inappropriate ideas. Rushing a bad service into place is harmful to patients.

We demand full accountability, and call upon Welsh Government to do the following:

1. Ensure that Professor Davies undertakes to interview for the role of clinical lead if it is his intention to remain in this position when the Welsh Gender Team clinic opens. This process, as for all other appointments to the Welsh Gender Team, must have stakeholder oversight.
2. Scrutinise the agreed business case, ensuring that all provisions and planning conform to the new CP182 protocols and associated guidance.
3. Ensure that patients on waiting lists are properly informed and ensure that waiting times will be reduced not extended once the new service becomes operational.

Yours sincerely,

Jenny-Anne Bishop, OBE AWGIPG and WG Strategic Equality Board

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