

WALES EQUALITY ALLIANCE

PRESS RELEASE – 20th May 2019

Welsh Gender clinic fails to open amid clinical mismanagement leaving hundreds in limbo

Trans health campaigners claim that clinical incompetence and poor management is responsible for the failure of the new Gender Identity service to open. This threatens to leave Welsh patients worse off with a service that was intended to be an improvement on the existing system.

An open letter from Trans health campaigners has been sent to Welsh Government signed by prominent members of the LGBT+ community, including Jenny-Anne Bishop OBE, Lisa Power MBE and members of the Wales Online Pinc List. The letter complains about the failure of the new Welsh Gender Team clinic to open as planned, and as originally promised, by Vaughan Gething, Cabinet Secretary for Health, Well-being and Sport. In his statement that coincided with the August 2017 Pride Cymru event, Gething stated that:

“From ...[autumn 2017], the foundations of a new interim care pathway will be in place to improve access to gender identity services for adults in Wales. The interim pathway has been endorsed by the All Wales Gender Identity Partnership Group, which includes representatives from the transgender community and service users.

Under the new model, a multidisciplinary service, known as the Welsh Gender Team (WGT), will provide support to a network of general practitioners (GPs) across Wales with a specialist interest in all areas of gender care, including hormone replacement therapy and will accept direct referrals from GPs” <https://gov.wales/written-statement-improving-adult-gender-identity-services-wales>

This announcement was welcomed by many Trans patients who were struggling with long waiting lists with Gething further promising that “from the end of March next year, the WGT will accept new referrals” - <https://gov.wales/written-statement-improving-adult-gender-identity-services-wales>. In 2018, delays resulted in the opening date being reviewed and slipping to 1st April 2019. Despite this, the WGT clinic has still not opened and nor have any specialist clinicians been recruited into the service.

In addition to the late delivery of the service, the open letter complains about the negative impact that poor decision making and inexperience has had on its prospects, risking inferior care to that provided by the London Gender Identity Clinic (GIC) where Welsh patients are currently referred. Professor Steve Davies was placed in role as clinical lead of the WGT in 2016 and was formally appointed in 2018. This was despite being involved in issues at Cardiff and Vale University Health Board that resulted in scores of Trans patients going without vital hormone prescriptions. Benjamin Marriott, a Trans patient from Cardiff, had been receiving health care from his GP practice after receiving a letter from the London GIC recommending hormone treatment. After moving home, his new GP declined to prescribe, and the endocrinology department declined a referral.

“Upon relocating and changing GPs, I was refused continuation of testosterone therapy after three years, against advice from the GIC. This caused mental anguish and anxiety about the reliability of my future healthcare... The GP told me their practice policy was not to administer any hormones to Trans people.”

With no trained gender clinicians currently recruited into the WGT, those in charge of setting up the new service opted to employ psychiatrists to plug the gap in workforce. In the open letter, the campaigners state that this is against current best practice and that the 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."

Currently in Wales, Trans patients are assessed by a psychiatrist before being referred, despite the World Health Organisation no longer classifying gender dysphoria as a mental health condition (<https://tgeu.org/world-health-organisation-moves-to-end-classifying-trans-identities-as-mental-illness/>):

"I struggled for years on waiting lists. Psychiatrists held me back unnecessarily in the old system and now Vaughan Gething's vision for a new all Wales service looks to be built on empty promises. It could be worse than the old system. The insensitivity and lack of real interest in delivering what is promised during Pride month is grievous."

Katie Solomon, a Trans woman and blogger on Trans equality issues from Newport stated that there is a "feeling of betrayal amongst Wales's trans community. The long-promised gender identity clinic is still not open!"

It is estimated that there are 5,000 Trans people in Wales, many of whom will need services provided by the WGT at some point in their lives. Approaching 500 patients are currently on waiting lists with some still waiting to be seen more than 3 years since first presenting at their GP surgery.

Jenny-Anne Bishop, a member of the All Wales Gender Identity Partnership stakeholder group said

"Having worked with WHSSC and NHS Wales for almost ten years on this new Pathway for Gender Diverse people and on the previous CP-21 protocol; it is both Heart breaking and so Frustrating to see all the good work the AWGIPG has done derailed by a few people, unqualified in this area, who continue to use outdated and discredited models for the new service whilst rejecting those trained and experienced in current Gender Identity healthcare. This can only result in a service that is flawed and will cause increasing delays and real harm to service users"

The open letter demands that Welsh Government intervenes to ensure the service specification is followed, there is an appropriate and transparent recruitment process, and patients are informed about the impact on waiting times as the service comes into operation.

In the last year two students at Cardiff University took their own lives because of the delays in providing Gender Identity healthcare in a timely fashion (https://tdor.translivesmatter.info/reports/2018/03/17/jacob-whelan_cardiff-wales-united-kingdom_3097f77d and <https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/09/20/trans-student-caffeine-overdose/>)

Jenny Charles, campaign manager from Wales Equality Alliance who delivered the open letter, says

"The situation is very worrying. To have a delay is one thing, but the prospect of being steered into a situation where things will deteriorate once services are delivered in Wales is too much to bear for many Trans patients. Things are bad enough as they are. People have died on waiting lists after taking their own life. Welsh Government must act now to rectify the situation before serious harm is done to the community."