



Senedd Cymru Health and Social Care Committee consultation on the future of general practice in Wales

Executive summary

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) Wales welcomes the opportunity to provide written evidence as part of the committee's inquiry on the future of general practice in Wales. Our response focusses on opportunities to improve general practice to make it fit for the future and take a more preventative approach to care by taking full advantage of the multi-disciplinary team.

Key points

- There are huge challenges facing general practice in Wales, particularly responding to the needs of an ageing population and projected increases in the number of people living with long-term conditions and frailty. The primary care workforce in the future will need to look radically different to respond to changing demographic needs with a far greater focus on prevention and addressing health inequalities, as recognised in key government policy documents.
- Despite a commitment in Welsh Government policy to shift resources from hospitals to the community, BMA analysis indicates that the proportion of NHS funding provided to general practice has reduced from over 8.7% of expenditure in 2005/06 to 6.1% of the budget in 2020/21.
- It is essential that in considering the future of general practice in Wales, the committee considers the primary care model in its entirety and ensuring that the needs of our complex population can be met by the right person, at the right time in the right place. More work is required to maximise the contribution of Allied Health Professionals.
- Speech and language therapists (SLTs) will have a key role to play, as part of the wider primary care team, in preventing deterioration in health and wellbeing which otherwise leads to costly and intensive support. SLTs should be embedded in all relevant community multi-disciplinary teams as part of their standard staffing.

About the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists

1. RCSLT is the professional body for speech and language therapists, SLT students and support workers working in the UK. The RCSLT has 22,000 members in the UK (750 in Wales) representing approximately 95% of SLTs (who are registered with the Health & Care Professions Council). We promote excellence in practice and influence health, education, care and justice policies.
2. Speech and language therapy manages the risk of harm and reduces functional impact for people with speech, language and communication support needs and/ or swallowing difficulties.

The general practice workforce, including workforce planning, and the growth of the multidisciplinary team;

3. There are huge challenges facing health and social care in Wales. The proportion of the population aged 80 and over will have doubled between 2000 and 2038¹. The ageing population and projected increases in the number of people living with long-term conditions and frailty will significantly increase the demand for health and care services. There will also be a significant increase in the number of people with severe learning difficulties, with a predicted 34% increase of people with severe learning disabilities by 2027². The primary care workforce in the future will need to look radically different in the future to respond to changing demographic needs with a far greater focus on prevention and addressing health inequalities.
4. The Welsh Government Science Evidence Advice report: NHS in 10+ years recognises that 'making the NHS more efficient will require more investment in primary care and wider workforce,' e.g. Allied Health Professionals (AHPs).³ This message is also echoed in the Strategic Programme for Primary Care model which advocates for a whole system approach to sustainable and accessible local health and wellbeing care. focusing on place-based care, care closer to home and **multi-professional working**. Recognising that allied health professions' expertise is vital to achieving the required shift from over-reliance on hospital-centred care, and to addressing unmet needs, the Strategic Programme for Primary Care has developed the [Primary and Community Care Allied Health Professions Guidance: organizing principles to optimize utilization](#).
5. The ageing population and projected increases in the number of people living with long-term conditions and frailty will significantly increase the demand for communication and swallowing support in the community. The speech and language therapy workforce has a key role to play in supporting the frail, elderly population. They enable people to live well

¹ Welsh Government (2023). Science Evidence Advice (SEA): NHS in 10+ years An examination of the projected impact of Long-Term Conditions and Risk Factors in Wales.

<https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2023-09/science-evidence-advice.pdf>

² Idriss, O, Allen, L, Alderwick, H (2020). Social care for adults aged 18–64. The Health Foundation. Intensive Interaction Institute. [online] Available at: <https://www.intensiveinteraction.org/> [Accessed 18 August 2022]

³ Welsh Government (2023). Science Evidence Advice (SEA): NHS in 10+ years An examination of the projected impact of Long-Term Conditions and Risk Factors in Wales.

at home and prevent hospital admissions by reducing risks when eating and drinking and aiding communication with family and health and care professionals. There is a high association between frailty in older adults and eating, drinking and swallowing (EDS) difficulties⁴. For those over 80, the incidence of EDS during acute admission to hospital is up to 82.4%⁵.

6. In alignment with the [Primary and Community Care Allied Health Professions Guidance: organizing principles to optimize utilization](#), our vision is that speech and language therapy services should be directly accessible within communities, as part of the multi-professional offer across Primary and Community Care. We believe this approach would improve access to early diagnosis and treatment, build capacity, alleviate workforce pressures, and supplement General Practitioners (GPs) to help achieve outcomes that matter to people.
7. The Strategic Programme for Primary Care AHP organising principles call for a number of key actions relating to ensuring whole system pathway approaches, strengthened AHP leadership, AHP activity and funding streams to be aligned across Regional Partnership Board (RPB) geographical areas.
8. There has been some progress in relation to leadership and ensuring AHP representation on cluster groups although this remains complicated by the large number and complexity of cluster groups and often short-term nature of funding streams. We have also seen several speech and language therapy projects funded under the Regional Integration Funding stream and Welsh Government AHP community funding pot. These much-needed projects are primarily focused on increasing adult service capacity in communities to support people with communication and swallowing difficulties and reduce hospital admissions.
9. We remain concerned however that the lack of data on AHPs and where they are based, lack of long-term workforce planning and limited routes into professions are affecting the full contribution of AHPs to the primary care model. Another limiting factor remains the under-investment in local health and social care facilities. These centres would enable a broader range of services—such as diagnostics, treatment, and rehabilitation—to be delivered closer to patients'. Such facilities would not only reduce travel times and enhance patient satisfaction but also foster collaboration among providers, improving the integration of primary, community, and social care services.
10. We believe there is alignment between our vision of direct access speech and language therapy provision within communities and the BMA calls within its Save our Surgeries report⁶;

⁴ Bahat, G, Yilmaz, O, Durmazoglu, S, Kilic, C, Tasgioglu, C, Karan, MA, (2019). Association between dysphagia and frailty in community dwelling older adults. *The Journal of Nutrition, Health and Ageing*;23(6):571-577. doi: 10.1007/s12603-019-1191-0 <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31233080/>

⁵ Mateos-Nozal, J, Montero-Errasquin, B, Sanchez Garcia, E, Romero Rodriguez, E, Cruz-Jentoft, A, (2020). High prevalence of oropharyngeal dysphagia in acutely hospitalised patients aged 80 years and older. *Journal of the American Medical Directors Association*. (12):2008-2011. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32499182/>

⁶ British Medical Association Cymru (2023). Save our Surgeries:GPC Wales. <https://www.bma.org.uk/media/7254/gp-report-save-our-surgeries-gpc-wales-english-final-web.pdf> (Accessed: 19.3.25)

‘For Welsh Government to support and drive clear public facing communications which educate and inform the public on their options in accessing care and support, and what they can expect from their GP practice when this is the right place to meet their needs.’

And

‘Surgeries need urgent capital investment to improve their ability to train the GPs and allied health professionals of the future in adequate premises.’

11. It would be extremely helpful if the committee considered progress on implementing the Primary and Community Care Allied Health Professions Guidance: organizing principles to optimize utilization as part of its inquiry on the future of general practice.

Further information

12. We hope this paper will be helpful in supporting the committee’s inquiry into the future of general practice. We would be happy to provide further information if this would be of benefit. Please see below our contact details.

Dr. Caroline Walters, External Affairs Manager (Wales), Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists
caroline.walters@rcslt.org

Confirmation

13. This response is submitted on behalf of The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists in Wales. We confirm that we are happy for this response to be made public.