



Ein cyf/Our ref: CHA.9437  
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Dyddiad/Date: 18 August 2022

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Diana Taylor

Dear Diana

## Re: Question submitted to Hywel Dda University Health Board's Annual General Meeting (AGM)

Thank you for your email of 21 July 2022 in which you submitted a question for consideration at the Health Board's AGM regarding the provision of Orthopaedic surgery at Withybush General Hospital (WGH). We sincerely apologise for the distress caused to all of our patients as a result of the extended waiting times they are experiencing.

Regrettably, as a consequence of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on services for non-emergency patients, our waiting lists have grown significantly over the past two years to levels not previously experienced. Unfortunately, whilst the higher levels of COVID infection seen in the earlier waves have now passed, the pandemic still has a significant and continuing impact on our ability to re-establish the level of service capacity we saw prior to March 2020.

Primarily due to continuing limitations on nurse staffing resources, we are currently able to support one elective ward area only at WGH (Ward 9), which operates on a 5-day basis Monday-Friday. The ward is not open at weekends.

Due to associated Infection, Prevention and Control (IP&C) risks specific to patients undergoing major joint replacement surgery (aside from any legacy IP&C issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic), the British Association of Orthopaedics (BOA) has issued clear guidance to NHS Trusts/Health Boards that inpatient orthopaedic surgery should, as a minimum, be supported by dedicated/protected elective ward beds to ensure patient safety and to minimise the risk of post-operative infection.

Consequently, we are currently unable to provide sufficient dedicated and protected staffed bed capacity at the hospital to support both inpatient surgical and other cancer specialty surgery, as well as elective inpatient orthopaedics. We have therefore been faced with the difficult decision to prioritise which surgical specialties are delivered at each of our hospital sites, due to the operational reality of trying to maximise the use of all of our key resources, namely staffing and theatre availability. Our priorities are to deliver the greatest volume of activity possible across our four sites and reduce the number of patients waiting in the quickest timeframe.

We have therefore determined that the current model of utilising WGH to support shorter stay, overnight and day case surgery across a range of mixed specialties, including cancer and orthopaedics allows us to deliver more operations than would be the case if we were to prioritise the elective ward at WGH for lower volume, longer stay, major joint replacement surgery.

Inpatient Orthopaedic surgery is currently taking place at Prince Philip Hospital (PPH) and Bronglais General Hospital (BGH), with our WGH based consultants travelling to Prince Philip to undertake the operations. Appropriate Pembrokeshire patients are also being offered their surgery at BGH under the care of Orthopaedic surgeons based at that hospital. Patients are being offered appointments in order of clinical priority, so there is no attempt to delay access in a way that disadvantages a specific county or area.

The decision on which services we have been able to offer at WGH is influenced by all of the above factors, some of which are subject to change at short notice. We recognise and understand the frustration caused to our clinical teams and patients alike by the factors that influence our Covid recovery plan.

Looking forward to the months ahead, the situation at WGH is further complicated by the necessity to relocate our day case unit at the hospital from mid-August to December 2022, to undertake urgent fire safety works. In order to preserve and protect this activity at the site, much of this work will need to be undertaken through our main theatre and Ward 9 facilities, thereby further limiting the opportunity to undertake major joint replacement surgery at the hospital during this period.

I appreciate that the above may not fully alleviate your concerns and worries, but please be assured that service delivery at each of our hospital sites is continually under review as we further recover from the pandemic and through the completion of the required works at WGH.

Yours sincerely



**Maria Battle**  
Chair