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Dyddiad/Date: 23 August 2022

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Judith Thomas

Dear Judith

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 questions for consideration at the Health Board's AGM regarding staffing levels and staff support. As you have detailed a number of questions, I will address each one of these in turn below:

1. *What is the HB doing to ensure safe staffing across all clinical teams especially those without coverage within section 25b of the Wales Staffing Levels Act?*

The Health Board has an overarching duty under the Nurse Staffing Levels (Wales) Act 2016 to ensure that we have robust workforce plans, recruitment strategies, structures and processes in place to ensure appropriate nurse staffing levels that provide "sufficient nurses to allow nurses time to care sensitively for patients" across all nursing services.

We review the nurse staffing levels in section 25B settings at least every six months (more frequently if required), but we also have a programme of work in place to review the nurse staffing levels in all the nursing service settings that fall outside Section 25B.

We currently have work ongoing in mental health inpatient settings, the health visiting service, the emergency departments and critical care services. In 2018, it was agreed within the Health Board that we would use the same triangulated approach to calculating the nurse staffing levels as we are required to use in the Section 25B settings.

We take into account any available service specific patient acuity/workforce planning tool data and quality indicator data and this, along with the professional judgement of the nursing management structure of that service, is used to inform the calculation of the nurse staffing level. We also consider any national recommendations/standards or best practice recommendations that exists around the particular service/specialty and the wider team around the patient, for example,

frailty workers, rehabilitation support workers and assistant practitioners to ensure that we have the right staff, with the right skills, in the right place at the right time. We undertake risk assessments on a shift by shift basis and deploy staff across clinical areas. We also utilise temporary staff through bank and agency to fill roster gaps wherever possible.

Some examples of actions which have been taken both operationally and on a strategic/corporate level to maintain the nurse staffing levels both in Section 25B wards but also across all nursing services of the Health Board are:

- Systems in place whereby risk assessments are undertaken, taking into account patients' needs (including acuity and dependency) versus the available staff (both substantive and temporary), staff's knowledge and skills.
- Specific recruitment initiatives targeting the specific needs of individual wards and departments, led by Workforce and OD team
- The STAR Nurse Leadership Development Programme which included Senior Sisters/Charge Nurses from both Section 25B and Section 25A clinical areas, to ensure that clinical leadership and expertise continues to be developed.
- The Workforce Development Task & Finish Group has been set up to oversee the delivery of an ambitious expansion of our apprenticeship scheme; increase the pipeline of the Band 4 Assistant Practitioner roles; increase the pipeline of nurses through the internal part-time programmes and create a support system that recognises the pastoral needs of the future workforce pipeline.
- We have contributed to the recruitment of internationally educated nurses, as part of the All Wales internationally educated nurses recruitment process and establish processes to support these individuals in practice.
- We are working collaboratively with Aberystwyth University in the recruitment of the first intake of over 30 student nurses, recruited as far as possible from the mid Wales area, due to commence September 2022.
- There is ongoing work with Swansea University around training placements for an additional 200 student nursing placements identified across the Health Board, in all fields of nursing practice.

2. What contingencies are there to reprioritise services should another Covid-19 wave be experienced and what plans are there around the vaccination programme for the autumn?

In the event of a further COVID-19 wave, the Health Board will reinstate its COVID-19 response plan in a proportionate way to the growth of the COVID-19 incidence in the community and any identified impact on our services.

We are working closely with our Primary Care contractors to enable a transition this year to deliver the COVID-19 vaccinations for the Autumn programme alongside the existing flu delivery programme, where we are able to do so. We do not anticipate this will be achieved across all our Primary Care sites, but now we are in receipt of the final guidance from the Joint Committee for Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) we are finalising our delivery plan. We will be supporting staff vaccination through our Mass Vaccination Centres, which will include health and

social care staff and those additional staff groups previously identified by the Vaccine Clinical Advisory Panel in Wales as eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine as part of a priority group.

3. How is staff welfare and wellbeing being supported as they continue to see exceptional demand on services whilst supporting the recovery plan?

We have a dedicated Staff Psychological Wellbeing Service led by a Consultant Clinical Psychologist, which provides a range of services for staff to help sustain and improve mental health and wellbeing; this includes:

- Access to guidance and confidential support for managers on issues relating to mental health and wellbeing at work impacting on team resilience
- Working as part of the wider Organisation Development function to support a culture of wellbeing and resilience - offering bespoke team interventions to support psychological wellbeing
- We facilitate sessions as part of ongoing development and leadership programmes
- An ongoing programme around Rest and Recovery - focusing on creating a culture where rest and recovery are enabled and valued
- Access to a range of high-quality resources on mental health and wellbeing at work which are regularly updated
- Support and guidance on which resources could be most useful depending on the needs of the individual
- Access to one-to-one psychological support with our own team of professionally trained practitioners
- Access to 24/7 support on the phone via our Employee Assistance Provider, Care First
- Access to evidence-based programmes/courses that support mental wellbeing Stress Control and Activate your Life
- The provision of an innovative new Recovery in Nature Ecotherapy Programme for staff experiencing work related stress or signs of burnout, funded by NHS Charities Together
- An internal HAPI app that houses all staff benefits and promotes our available wellbeing support pathways
- A number of wellbeing roadshows running over the summer, highlighting what support is available for staff.
- The implementation of Work in Confidence, an anonymous concerns platform where staff can raise any issues or ideas.
- A specific action plan around Financial Wellbeing, focusing on various pathways to support staff through cost of living crisis.
- General financial webinars run in conjunction with Barclays to support staff in managing finances, working with Money Helper to run more over next 6-12 months.
- A programme of work to create and enhance staff rest areas to support recuperation and recovery.
- A detailed twelve-month programme of work to enhance staff appreciation and recognition.

- Learning fund to support staff to learn a new non work-related skill away from the workplace.
- We are also piloting a programme of culture change work in areas where we are seeing exceptional demand, to ensure the support on the ground is available for staff to enable time out and reflection.

In addition, the Making a Difference programme has a significant emphasis on self-care, promotion of development opportunities and signposting to services to support well-being.

4. What support will be given to staff experiencing Long Covid symptoms?

Any member of staff experiencing Long Covid is able to access the Long Covid Service, either via referral from the Occupational Health Service or referral via their GP. The Long COVID service in HDUHB meets the specific needs of patients in a timely, effective manner and within the context of Local and National strategies. It places the patient at the centre of care through a single point of referral and assessment to an integrated MDT service for investigation, to support and manage symptoms and rehabilitation. This approach improves integration of care across different services and avoids multiple referrals by coordinating information sharing, to enable professionals to make quick decisions.

With support from multi professional rehabilitation professionals, including Psychologists, Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists, Dietitians, and Therapy Assistant Practitioners, the service provides a comprehensive individualised person-centred assessment, utilising NICE recommended Long COVID assessment tools. The initial consultation is an interdisciplinary assessment to discuss the broad symptoms of Long COVID and identifies the main goals and patient centred aims. Following first assessment, all patients are offered self-management resources tailored to their individual concerns, and if indicated, further interventions from the MDT.

Specific arrangements were put in place from March 2020 until June 2022 in response to COVID, in line with Welsh Government guidance, which afforded staff more generous sickness arrangements. The NHS terms and conditions of service handbook and the Medical and Dental handbook already have provisions that can be considered on a case-by-case basis for staff developing Long Covid, such as an extension of contractual sick pay and an application for Injury Allowance. The pay arrangements for long term absence following infection with COVID-19 were also extended beyond our normal contractual arrangements, so as to provide time to support recovery and for interventions to be in place to support, enable and facilitate individuals to return to work.

Our support for staff with Long Covid has evolved as we have learnt more about its impact. We now have a range of supportive measures split into three aspects:

- Short term from an infection control perspective

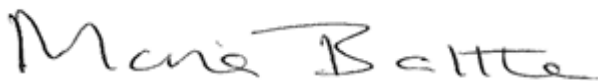
- A supportive toolkit for staff with Long Covid which includes bespoke phased return to work plans, multiple phased returns on full pay for those where a sustained return to work has proven more difficult to manage, keeping in touch days, increased access to health and wellbeing/OH services, refresher skills courses and an option to have career conversations
- Support for individuals absent as a result of delayed treatment

The workforce team links with managers and staff with Long Covid to check in, advise and update the employee and the manager on any updated provisions and support available to them.

We can also confirm that a number of staff are being supported by the Health Board's Long Covid Service.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely



Maria Battle
Chair