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Betsi Cadwaladr
University Health Board



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University Health Board

ANNUAL REVIEW 2023/24



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This Annual Review offers a summary of the detailed Annual Report and Accounts 2023/24.

Copies of all these documents can be downloaded from the Health Board's website at <https://bcuhb.nhs.wales/about-us/governance-and-assurance1/> or are available on application to the Health Board's Communications Team at BCUHB, Block 5, Carlton Court, St Asaph Business Park, St Asaph, LL17 0JG, by telephone on 03000 840 008 or by e-mail to bcuhbpressdesk@wales.nhs.uk

Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board Annual Review 2023/24

This has been a year of great change for the organisation. It has been a year where we have continued to face significant challenges, but where we have also started to see some improvement while building the foundations for a stronger future.

This has been the first full year since we were placed into special measures by Welsh Government, which triggered a change of leadership, including the appointment of a full new team of Independent Members to the Board.

Although the effects of COVID-19 are finally on the wane, we have been dealing with other challenging issues including industrial action by some of our staff and a continuing difficult financial situation.

Meanwhile, significant failings with some aspects of our performance have been identified which we are working hard to address.

The financial context in which we, and virtually all other public bodies, operate continues to be challenging, both in the short and long term. Although we have made progress over the last year, we continue to have an underlying financial deficit which we must address.

We also continue to face staff shortages in many key areas, caused by a difficult recruitment market. That is why we, along with other Health Boards, supported the Welsh Government's recruitment drive for medical staff from India to come and work with us in Wales.

Our main focus throughout the year has been on patients and their needs. We understand the difficulties that many of them experience, including waits at Emergency Departments, for surgery and for dental appointments.

We share their frustrations and know that we can, and must, do better. We have taken a conscious decision to be as open and transparent as possible with the people of North Wales, so that they can understand the pressures we face and we can listen to their views.

That is why we have started a series of community conversations, visiting towns and villages across North Wales, where everyone is welcome to meet and question our Board members and Executive Team on the services we provide. We want to hear about their experiences, both good and bad, so that we can listen and learn. These events will continue throughout this year and beyond.

While it is easy to focus on the negatives, there are reasons to be optimistic and for that we must thank our staff. They provide high quality care, support and treatment to thousands of people across North Wales every week, and we wish to pay tribute to their ongoing dedication and expertise for the way they look after our patients and the wider community.

The resilience, commitment and enthusiasm of front-line and support staff is something that we can all be proud of, and that's why we are optimistic for the future. For example, over the last year we have reduced the number of people waiting 52 weeks for a first appointment by 45%, vascular services have received a positive external review from Health Improvement Wales and we have introduced new ways of treating and diagnosing some cancers including using artificial intelligence in breast and prostate cancers.

Construction work on a brand-new orthopaedic hub at Llandudno Hospital has also started. The Welsh Government agreed funding of up to £29.4m for the new facility to help reduce orthopaedic waiting times. The new hub will transform elective orthopaedic services by delivering a planned 1,900 procedures a year and will be operational in 2025.

We do recognise that we can't operate in isolation because we are part of a much wider health and social care system that includes local authorities, educational institutions, voluntary organisations and the ambulance service.

We value the partnerships we have with these and many other organisations across North Wales and beyond. They face similar challenges to us to meet growing demands within their available resources, and we will continue to work closely in partnership with them wherever possible to maximise the resources available to improve the health and wellbeing of our population.

For example, we continue to work closely with Bangor University where the first full medical degree programme in North Wales, delivered in collaboration with Cardiff University and primary care providers in the region, will welcome its first students in September 2024.

There is no doubt that the coming year will continue to be challenging, but there is hope for the future. We have produced a three-year plan, setting out our ambitions through to 2027, that embraces a culture of improvements to our services that we believe shows that we are prioritising the right things to improve the health service in North Wales.



DYFED EDWARDS
Chair,
BCUHB



CAROL SHILLABEER
Chief Executive,
BCUHB

Who we are

The Health Board is the largest health organisation in Wales, with a budget of £1.99 billion and a workforce of more than 20,000. The Health Board is an integrated health system that strives for excellent compassionate care delivered in partnership with the public and other statutory and third sector organisations.

We are responsible for the delivery of health care services to more than 700,000 people across the six counties of North Wales (Anglesey, Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham). This includes the provision of primary, community and mental health, as well as general hospital services.

In primary care settings the Health Board delivers NHS care through a combination of independent contractors and directly delivered services across North Wales. This network of primary care services covers 96 medical practices ("GP practices"), 83 dental and orthodontic practices, 69 optometry/optician practices and 147 community pharmacies.

In community settings, the Health Board delivers a wide range of community NHS services including community nursing, health visiting, physiotherapy, and palliative care, through a network of health centres, clinics, community team bases and 16 community hospitals, coordinated across 14 localities.

Community mental health services are delivered from bases across North Wales, supported by inpatient mental health units across the region.

The Health Board also delivers primary, community and mental health services to the prison population within His Majesty's Prison Berwyn in Wrexham.

General hospital services are provided from three main sites (Ysbyty Gwynedd in Bangor, Glan Clwyd Hospital in Bodelwyddan and Wrexham Maelor Hospital), with some surgical services also being delivered in Abergele and Llandudno.

Where NHS care cannot be provided within North Wales, such as for certain rare conditions or highly specialist services, the Health Board works with other NHS providers in Wales and England, to ensure that patients can still access the specialist treatments they need.

We are also responsible, in partnership, for improving the health and wellbeing of local people through activities such as our successful vaccination programmes and school health services.





Overview of activity

Here we would like to provide a snapshot of the services our staff deliver and the associated activity.

The majority of patient contacts – about four out of every five – with health services take place in the community, for example in GP practices, pharmacies, dental services, optometry services or patients’ own homes. In 2023/24:

- 71,843 consultations delivered in pharmacies under the Common Ailments Scheme
- 38,725 emergency medicines services consultations delivered by pharmacies
- 18,286 people on average received NHS dental treatment every month

It was also a busy year for our hospitals with increased activity levels across almost all areas, reflecting both the emergency pressures that the Health Board has faced and the work to increase our planned treatment activity as we seek to recover from the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

In 2023/24 there were:

- 822,589 hospital outpatient appointments
- 326,964 Emergency Department or Minor Injury Unit attendances
- 11,737 planned procedures delivered
- 93,089 day-case operations
- 5,595 births



Our Therapy services are a vital component of the whole health and social care system and during the year they received more than 130,400 new referrals, and:

- more than 91,000 new outpatient appointments were attended
- more than 271,000 follow-up appointments were attended
- more than 333,500 patients were treated/seen in hospitals by Therapists

During 2023/24 our District Nurses:

- carried out 659,2800 visits of which about 43,943 were outside of core hours and 114,131 at the weekend to ensure an equitable and accessible range of services.



Performance overview

The past 12 months have again been very challenging for the Health Board. We, like every other Health Board in Wales, have faced increased costs, leading to pressure on our already strained budgets as we strive to do the very best for the people of North Wales.



2023/24 also marks the first full year of being placed into special measures by Welsh Government, adding to the issues we face here. Being placed into special measures is not the only issue we have had to deal with this past year. NHS staff across Wales have been on strike and, while we understand the reasons for their industrial action, it has caused disruption to many planned procedures.

Following a critical Audit Wales report on our governance and financial management in 2023, we’re pleased that the latest report published in 2024 acknowledges the progress that we’ve made, although there is still some work to do.

There have been a number of other complex and difficult issues raised during the year:

- We are still experiencing challenges in recruiting staff in some disciplines, but have recently been successful in recruiting nurses from India for some posts.
- Waiting times are still too long in many cases and we share the frustration of patients who are waiting for treatment.
- Primary care services, including dentistry, are under exceptional pressure and we are taking action to improve these services.
- The Health Board was fined following a Health and Safety Executive prosecution. We have apologised to the family involved and are determined to keep improving the service we provide, especially where we fall short of our ambition to be an excellent service.
- We have also been the subject of a number of Prevention of Future Deaths reports from North Wales coroners. We acknowledge the importance of these reports and take them seriously as behind the statistics are people who have experienced personal loss. Work is ongoing to identify and respond to the key themes and points of learning that the reports contain. We have much to improve on to ensure that we provide services with quality and patient safety at their heart.

We have demonstrated areas of improvement during the year, with activity levels across nearly every aspect of our services building on improvements from last year and continuing to increase, and we have successfully delivered a number of key strategic projects.

Our Integrated Health Communities are establishing themselves as a key structure in our efforts to progress our working relationships with local authorities, especially in relation to social services and education.

As for special measures, it is never good for any public body to be placed in this situation. However, it has helped focus our efforts on elements of our service that need improvement.

We have already seen improvements and are treating people sooner in a number of areas. For example, the number of people waiting more than 52 weeks for a first appointment has been reduced by 45% and the number of people waiting over 104 weeks has been reduced by 37%. However, there is much more to be done and we are working hard to address the long waits.

Vascular services have been de-escalated by Health Inspectorate Wales and received a positive external review, and Welsh Government has approved our plans for a multi-million-pound orthopaedic hub in Llandudno that will treat an additional 1,900 patients a year when it's operational in 2025.

Behind the scenes we're managing our budgets better. We've agreed a financial plan and savings target, and provided additional training for more than 400 staff on improving our procurement practices. We've reduced expensive short-term contracts, including interim staff, by 82%.

We now have a full complement of Independent Board Members who can ensure scrutiny of our services through our sub committees. We're investing in our staff and are encouraging a positive working culture that is open and transparent so that everyone can share their thoughts and ideas to improve the patient experience.

We have made progress over the last year. But we are in no doubt that we still have some way to go. Improving our services so that we exit special measures is important, but even more important is ensuring that all the services we provide are the best for the people of North Wales.

2023/24 – A snapshot of some of our developments in the year

While it has been another challenging year for the Health Board, we know that every day our staff do amazing things to support our communities across North Wales and each other.

It is important for us to recognise and celebrate this incredible effort and to share these stories to help people get a better understanding of the services we provide and how they can access them appropriately.

APRIL 2023:

Patient in Flintshire's new stroke rehab centre thanks consultant for 'saving him'



A new stroke rehabilitation centre opened in Deeside Community Hospital as part of a £3million programme to improve stroke care in North Wales.

The first male patient in the stroke rehabilitation centre was Carl Lamb, 59, from Rossett, who thanked Flintshire and Wrexham's new Stroke Consultant Nia Williams for helping him during his recovery.

Carl, a joiner by trade, collapsed whilst working and when he called his wife and heard himself speak, he realised he was slurring his words and that he'd had a stroke. He was taken to the nearest hospital in Cheshire and transferred to Wrexham Maelor Hospital's stroke ward. He was then given the first male bed available in the new centre.

MAY 2023:

Ysbyty Gwynedd doctor recognised at national award ceremony



A doctor described as a 'visionary leader' has been recognised at a national awards ceremony that honours the best and brightest ethnic women in Wales.

Dr Kakali Mitra won the Management and Leadership Award at the Ethnic Minority Welsh Women Achievement Association Awards in Cardiff.

Dr Mitra was appointed as Consultant Interventional Radiologist at Ysbyty Gwynedd in 2007 and has been the Clinical Director for Radiology at the Health Board since 2018. In this role she has overseen the transformation of Radiology services in North Wales.

JUNE 2023:

'We're at the crossroads of an exciting new world...and we are at the forefront'



A consultant pathologist who has pioneered the use of AI software to help diagnose prostate cancer, is spearheading another surge into what has been termed "computational pathology".

Dr Muhammad Aslam and his colleague Dr Anu Gunavardhan have been using the programme to help diagnose breast cancers. The application, called the Galen platform and developed by Ibex Medical Analytics, has been piloted within the Health Board and the team is the first in the UK to use it clinically to assist in breast cancer diagnosis.

Dr Aslam believes this new clinical use could herald the dawning of a new era in cancer diagnostics, as breast cancer treatment requires quick and accurate testing in order to get more successful outcomes for patients.

AUGUST 2023:

'My husband thought I was dying'- how Rapid Diagnosis Clinic helped grandmother beat cancer



JULY 2023:

New blood test unit reduces waiting times from weeks to days



The opening of a new Phlebotomy Unit in Wrexham meant patients had their wait for a blood test appointment reduced from six weeks to three days.

The unit, called Ty Madoc, opened at Wrexham Maelor Hospital with six new chairs for patients to have their bloods taken, and also offers evening appointments.

Due to the pandemic, blood test waiting times increased to an average of six weeks as less locations offered blood test appointments. Ty Madoc opened to help meet the demand and growing needs of patients in the area, and since it opened 15,000 blood tests are done every month in Wrexham alone, helping reduce the waiting times for patients.

A grandmother's family thought she was going to die when her weight dropped by almost 25 per cent in just two months. However, her GP referred her to Glan Clwyd Hospital's Rapid Diagnosis Clinic.

It discovered she had kidney cancer and then set out her treatment programme within nine days.

Happily, Jean Machin, a retired medical secretary from Rhuddlan, had her cancerous kidney removed five weeks after visiting the clinic.

SEPTEMBER 2023:

Teenager thanks Blaenau Ffestiniog practice staff for saving her life



A teenager thanked practice staff in Blaenau Ffestiniog for saving her life after she became critically ill with undiagnosed type 1 diabetes.

14-year-old Jorja Horne-Edwards was rushed to Canolfan Goffa Ffestiniog by Ysgol y Moelwyn staff after she was found collapsed in the toilet at school.

Staff at the health centre assessed Jorja when she arrived and found her blood sugar was extremely high indicating Type 1 Diabetes and imminent diabetic ketoacidosis (DKA) – a serious complication of diabetes that can be life-threatening.

Jorja was flown to Ysbyty Gwynedd via Wales Air Ambulance where she later received a diagnosis of Type 1 Diabetes and is now receiving regular treatment to manage her condition.

OCTOBER 2023:

'Quick, efficient and completely painless' - Patients thank hospital team for performing first in Wales bladder procedure



Two patients at Wrexham Maelor Hospital thanked the medical team for performing 'quick and completely painless' procedure, the first of its kind in Wales, using cutting-edge laser to remove bladder tumours or suspicious areas.

The procedure used a Trans Urethral Laser Ablation (TULA), an examination of the bladder using a camera on a thin flexible tube that uses a laser for bladder treatment.

John James, 84, had reoccurring growths on his bladder for more than 15 years and had previously had them removed via a full surgical procedure under general anaesthetic, taking a whole day in the hospital and longer to recover.

John was one of the first to have them removed with the laser. Elizabeth Comer, 82, also has reoccurring growths on her bladder and had previously had them removed under local anaesthetic.

NOVEMBER 2023:

State of the art community dental clinic opens at Bryn Beryl Hospital



A new Community Dental Clinic opened at Bryn Beryl Hospital. The new building boasts spacious dental treatment rooms, a decontamination room and clinical room and new specialist equipment such as adaptable chairs to enable people who use wheelchairs to easily access care.

The clinic, which is a referral only service, is home to a dedicated dental team that includes nurses, therapist, dentist and healthcare assistant, who provide dental care to people who cannot be easily treated in general dental practice, such as patients who have certain health conditions, a learning disability or a mental health issue.

JANUARY 2024:

New NHS Pharmacy opens in Llanberis



DECEMBER 2023:

Welsh Language Team win national award for helping schools and young people to engage with the world of work



Our Welsh Language Team picked up the Best Promoter of Welsh in the Workplace at the annual Careers Wales Valued Partner Awards.

The national awards celebrate the efforts of employers throughout Wales who work in partnership with Careers Wales to help schools and young people to engage with the world of work.

The Welsh Language Team was nominated for the work it has done to inform, inspire and motivate young people about career opportunities within the health sector in North Wales, in particular the opportunities to work bilingually.

A new NHS Pharmacy opened in Llanberis, ensuring that local people once again have easy access to medicines and expert advice on their doorstep.

Following the closure of the town's pharmacy in 2023, the Health Board worked with Fferyllwyr Llŷn, whose other branches include Nefyn, Abersoch, Llanbedrog, Blaenau Ffestiniog and Criccieth, to set up a new pharmacy in the town.

The new pharmacy opened in Llanberis towards the end of November and offers a wide range of services including prescription dispensing and common ailments.



FEBRUARY 2024:

Name revealed for new Mother and Baby Unit

The name of a new regional Mother and Baby mental health unit was revealed. Preparatory building work officially started in November on the £7.5m single storey building, which is the first of its kind across Cheshire, Merseyside, and North Wales and will be based at the Countess of Chester Health Park.

The name 'Seren Lodge' was chosen by mums who have experienced maternal mental ill-health and features a nod to the new cross-border partnership between the NHS in Wales and England.

MARCH 2024:

Films Premiere



A new series of films designed to create a better understanding of dementia was showcased at a premiere screening in Wrexham.

More than one hundred guests got an exclusive preview of the five short 'Living Better with Dementia' films at the Odeon

Cinema. The guests, including members of the public, health and social care staff, attended matinee and evening showings of the film that aim to raise awareness and provide support for people living with or caring for someone with dementia.

The idea for the films came from Professor Tracey Williamson, Consultant Nurse for Dementia, and were funded by the Health Board. The premieres were kindly funded by the North Wales Regional Partnership Board, which was keen for the films to gain maximum reach across North Wales and beyond.

Our plans for the future

In March, we introduced our Integrated Three-Year Plan for 2024 to 2027.

This Integrated Plan marks an important point for the Health Board. It is the first plan developed by the Health Board under the leadership of a new Chair and Chief Executive Officer, supported by a substantial change in Board membership. It signals a clear ambition to drive through transformation and improvement and provide high quality and sustainable services for the people of North Wales. This plan outlines many of the actions needed to do this and in particular highlights that permanent success requires us to address current challenges with a strong understanding of the needs of the future.

As such, we are signalling the need to establish a clear strategic vision for the Health Board over the next ten-year period that leads to improvements in health and wellbeing and delivers excellent healthcare services for the people of North Wales. This will guide us to build further upon the services that work well whilst supporting services that need reconfiguring to meet current and future demand.



To do this we will listen carefully to, and work with the people of North Wales and our partners and our intent to do this is clearly identified within this Plan. This will lead to the best solutions for North Wales and recognises that those solutions involve deep and meaningful relationships built upon trust and an understanding that working together as a 'whole system' will support the Health Board and our partners, and lead to better outcomes.

The Health Board is the biggest employer in North Wales, with an annual budget of around £2 billion. We therefore want to use this public resource to help North Wales to thrive. This includes how we can create opportunities for our current and future workforce working carefully with partners whilst doing so. It also includes opportunities to improve how we spend our budget to get the best health outcomes for the population of North Wales and to maximise our role as an 'anchor organisation' in Wales.

Finally, we would like to thank our communities and partners for their support and willingness to share advice and ideas. We look forward to building upon this as we strengthen these relationships and together explore ways of improving health care services in North Wales now and in the future.

Get involved

Our main purpose is to improve health and deliver excellent care. We aim to put our patients and our communities at the centre of all that we do.

We want people to feel they are being listened to, and that their views are making a valuable contribution to local health services in North Wales.

There are lots of ways people can get involved in supporting and engaging with the Health Board. This can be through volunteering, partnership working or just keeping up-to-date.

More information about how people can do this can be found in the [Get Involved](#) section of the BCUHB website.

Stay Informed

People can keep themselves up-to-date with what the Health Board is doing through the [News Section](#) on the BCU website, or by following our social media channels:

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