Notes of Spotlight session on dentistry December 2023

Medical Institute Wrexham

The attendance was very limited from the general dental services. However, there are several members of the community dental team in attendance, along with Peter Greensmith and Rebecca Hollingshead from the health board.

The meeting was informal, and there was no agenda in place. However, we were able to discuss several topics surrounding the health board’s current strategy for managing NHS primary care dentistry across North Wales.

We started off by discussing QI and ways with which we can use this to encourage more general dentists and their teams to attend meetings such as this. I stressed that these meeting need to be fair and reflective against any targets we have and be in working hours, ideally. This would appear to be something that is not really viable at present, but the HB do support the idea.

The discussion was very much around continuous improvement and empowering the dental team to provide better care for their patients.

We moved on to discuss the ongoing issues around restorative provision in secondary care.

It was noted that recruitment was currently on hold as Pete and his team had been given the task of reviewing the situation to find a more appropriate solution for this post-pandemic era.

The implementation of dentists with specialist interest in oral surgery was also on hold now, in North Wales, as there are issues currently surrounding procurement within the health board. This is likely to proceed at some point in the New Year although a date could not be given.

We spent some time discussing the associations with Liverpool and Cardiff dental schools and further afield to Manchester and Newcastle. The health board has currently been working closely with Liverpool and Cardiff to work out strategies to bring dental students in year four and year five into North Wales to experience different forms of primary care dental provision. Work will continue in the new year to strengthen these ties and develop them further. The LDC has offered to work alongside the health board to promote this.

Further discussion was had with Rebecca about how we’re able to reach out to the various strands of the dental profession to engage better and promote the profession across the region. At some point the academy website will be up and running and this will offer a place for people to connect and access information.

It was highlighted that we need to promote good news and not just continue with the rhetoric of failure. North Wales dentistry has come a long way in a short period of time and although the GDS is no doubt struggling at present, that is not because of the HB and their work but more because of the contractual imposition, recruitment and costs.

It was stressed that better relationships between GDS/CDS and secondary care was needed and a much clearer understanding of who does what and where. It was raised by one of the secretaries that they knew where dentist work, as they were doing the discharge letters to them, however, a lot of the actual CDS dentists had no real idea of who they were referring to. We discussed how best we could improve these relationships and understand who does what and where.

Finally, we discussed using train work live to promote the region further, and this was something that Rebecca and Pete had already engaged with. This was a line very much with our conversation about the Dental Academy. However, I felt more work needs to be done here to give a clearer mandate to what the Dental Academy is and how it can be used to support current and future practitioners in North Wales to develop their skills and provide better care for their patients. The work around bringing younger dentists to the region was covered with initiatives such as WERO and longitudinal GPT places. I mentioned that we need to have a wider view on this and start with schools and work forward. There needs to be a clear plan on a page of what we are trying to achieve and by when?

In summary, I feel that, once again, the GDS have missed an opportunity to engage with the health board and the CDS on a face-to-face basis, and I would encourage more people to attend at the next meeting to support some of the initiatives that the health board are pushing forward with.

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