



Ein cyf/Our ref: MA-P/VG/5170/19

Suzy Davies AM  
National Assembly for Wales  
Cardiff Bay  
CF99 1NA

23 October 2019

Dear Suzy,

I am writing to you in relation to comments you raised during Business Questions on 8 October 2019, regarding the provision of minor injuries units in Wales and your specific concerns about the minor injuries unit at Singleton Hospital.

It is essential that patients are able to access high quality and convenient health services at or as close to their homes as possible to meet their clinical need. In line with Welsh Government policy, I expect Health Boards to plan and deliver local services to enable timely access to urgent and emergency care, 24/7, based on local population need. It is for all Health Boards to determine how they deliver on this expectation, including whether to utilise Minor Injuries Units (MIUs) as a method of responding to people with less acute needs, and they must regularly review services to ensure they meet the needs of the communities they serve.

Health Boards need to ensure that the aim of MIUs are clear to aid decision making among patients and avoid costly service duplication. MIUs may have a useful role in managing people with minor illnesses to avoid increasing pressure at Emergency Departments. However, it may also be more appropriate for Health Boards to utilise available resources in a different way and signpost patients with less serious injuries or ailments that would otherwise gravitate to an Emergency Departments or dial 999 to self-care, out-of-hours primary care and community pharmacy services.

Turning to your specific concerns around the temporary closure of the minor injuries unit (MIU) at Singleton Hospital, the day-to-day running of the hospital is an operational matter for the Swansea Bay University Health Board. I have, therefore, sought advice from the Health Board regarding the current status of the MIU at Singleton Hospital to enable me to respond more fully.

The Health Board has advised that the MIU at Singleton Hospital is dependent on being located next door to the Singleton Assessment Unit, to allow for the provision of additional clinical staff cover if necessary. The MIU was temporarily closed, with the agreement of the local Community Health Council, in November 2018 due to refurbishment of Singleton Assessment Unit (SAU) which required the SAU to move to a different location. It was

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

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initially intended that the MIU would reopen in March 2019. However, during the agreed period of closure, the loss of some of the GPs from the MIU rota has meant that, in spite of active efforts to recruit additional GPs, it has not been possible to safely reopen the unit within the original planned timescales.

The Health Board has also advised that recruitment of additional GPs has been challenging from a number of perspectives:

- It is a small number of GPs who would be eligible to cover the MIU. Unlike A&E, where there is senior cover and input, the doctor in the Unit is lone working from a medical perspective. Therefore any prospective GPs would need to have previous recent experience and be confident in the treatment of minor injuries (in a facility that does not have x-ray facilities); and
- MIU sessions would need to be covered either in addition to, or in the place of, general practice sessions. The former would be difficult for GPs to take on given recent tax and pensions changes that could financially penalise GPs for taking on the extra work. Demands on broader primary care would make the latter difficult.

During the period of closure the Health Board has nevertheless used the existing MIU resources to support its wider unscheduled care system, for instance by boosting the Acute GP Unit (AGPU) at the hospital and reviewing Welsh Ambulance Service patients due to arrive by ambulance. Using resources in this way has reduced unnecessary hospital admissions and also diverted ambulance patients to alternatives forms of care.

I understand that the Health Board will shortly carry out a public engagement exercise to consider options for the future use of MIU resources at the site. Work is underway to develop options, with the involvement of clinicians, service users, carers and other partner organisations. Subject to the Board's agreement, and Community Health Council's support, the formal engagement is expected to launch in December 2019.

The Health Board has advised that it does not plan to re-open the Singleton MIU prior to the conclusion of the public engagement exercise.

I hope this response provides you with the assurances you were seeking.

Yours sincerely,



**Vaughan Gething AC/AM**

Y Gweinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol  
Minister for Health and Social Services