

This response was submitted to the Children, Young People and Education Committee consultation on Sixth Senedd Priorities

CYPE SP 93

Ymateb gan: Sarah Williamson, Swyddog Polisi, Materion Seneddol a Materion Cyhoeddus, Coleg Nyrsio Brenhinol Cymru

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Theme 1: School-age education

The Royal College of Nursing is a strong supporter of the 'Mind over Matter' report published by the fifth Senedd Children, Young People and Education Committee in 2018. Since 2018 it was recognised that there was a need for steep changes in emotional and mental health support for children and young people in Wales. COVID-19 has provided the opportunity to evaluate current capabilities and an opportunity to determine the extent of the need to expand services in order to improve mental health service.

COVID-19 has affected many school age children, it's been acknowledged that children and young people have recorded feeling anxious and distressed by the pandemic. Furthermore children or young people may have lost family members due to COVID-19 and will require support. Bereavement can be emotionally distressing for children and young people. It is important that a school is informed of a family bereavement so that they can offer any necessary support.

School nurses are in the ideal position to provide advice, support and referrals for pupils that have experienced distress and anxiety caused by COVID-19. However, in order to do so, the school nursing services require support in terms of their capacity including administrative capacity along with access to the latest resources and advice on referrals

Furthermore with the roll out of the COVID-19 vaccination to school aged children it is important that there are sufficient number of school nurses to support the vaccination effort and coordinate a programme if vaccinations are to be given in schools.

Theme 2: Further and higher education

N/A

Theme 3: Health and well-being, including social care (as they relate to children and young people)

Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

- **The Committee should launch an inquiry into the specialist and residential mental health services.**

During the fifth Senedd, the Committee extensively look at the emotional and mental health of children and young people in their inquiry, 'Mind over matter'. The Committee launched an in depth inquiry in 2018 and followed up on this work in 2020.



Mind over matter looked at the emotional resilience of children and young people and the importance of providing help as early as possible. The Royal College of Nursing would welcome a follow up inquiry specifically looking into specialist and residential mental health inpatient services. A child or young person with severe and enduring mental ill-health who requires specialist services can be extremely vulnerable and experiencing a tremendously difficult time in their life. It is important that Wales can provide care for these individuals.

Being admitted to hospital or an inpatient facility for any ailment, at any age can be a worrying and stressful experience. When a child or young person requires inpatient care due to mental ill-health this add another dimension, with additional challenges for both the child or young person, those providing care and their families. To add to this, the experience can become further complex when the child or young patient is admitted to an unsuitable ward such as an adult ward because there is no room on a child ward, when the facility is far from home, for example in Birmingham, or when the child or young person's preferred language is Welsh. A child or young person should be cared for in an age-appropriate, caring and supportive environment. They should also receive care in their preferred language.

However currently, inpatient CAMHS are under an immense amount of pressure due to the increase service demand and a significant workforce shortage. This has led to children and young people who need inpatient services being placed on adult wards and in facilities far from home. The Royal College of Nursing believes specialist and residential mental health facilities need urgent investment to ensure the experience of being admitted for a child or young person is as stress free as it can be.

Theme 4: Children and young people

Learning Disabilities

- **The Committee should launch an inquiry into the services available for children and young people and their families with learning disabilities. This must include an assessment of the learning disability workforce.**

There are currently 16,000 children with a learning disability in Wales. Some learning disabilities are discovered at birth, whilst others are not identified until much later. The extent of a child's disability will become clearer as children grow and develop, e.g. talking, walking or reading.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on all area of society, but it is has become well known that the pandemic has had an unequal impact on pockets of society including those with learning disabilities. The effects of the pandemic on children with learning disabilities has yet to be fully explored.

However, the pandemic has exposed high levels of health inequalities within our society. People with learning disabilities already experienced more health inequalities than the general population, demonstrated by the increased rate of preventable deaths among those with a learning disability, and COVID-19 has sadly confirmed this. A report by Public Health Wales noted COVID-19 deaths are three to six times higher in those with a learning disability than the general population in



Wales.¹ The higher death rate mirrors the higher non-COVID-19 mortality rate experienced by those with learning disabilities.

The experience of those with learning disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic has not yet been fully understood, this is especially true for children and young people with learning disabilities.

Children with a learning disability are more likely to face challenges with physical and mental health, family poverty and difficulty at school. Support during the early years will boost early development and provide children the best start to life. This includes access to learning disability nurses who can provide support and guidance for the family and access the needs of a child or young person with a learning disability.

Children and young people with learning disabilities use health services just like everyone else. However it has been acknowledged that 97% of people with a learning disability have other co-existing conditions such as physical health conditions, mental ill-health, epilepsy and physical impairments.²This means that children and young people with learning disabilities will require continuous access to health services throughout their life.

A learning disability nurse can provide support for the individual in understanding and accessing health services. They are also vitally important for supporting a child or young person transitioning from child to adult services. The transition from child to adult services can be a confusing and stressful time for anyone but for a young person or child with a learning disability this can be extremely challenging, especially when services are ill-equipped for the transition. Health services can be poorly designed to meet the environmental requirement of people with learning disabilities, and not equip with the skills required to make the reasonable adjustments that would enable equitable access to healthcare. This is precisely why a learning disability nursing is crucial in every setting.

In 2020, we celebrated 100 years of learning disability nursing. Learning disability nursing is pivotal to ensuring individuals can receive the level of care they need. However Wales does not have enough learning disability nurse to meet current or future demand. Learning disability nurses are needed in every setting to ensure the appropriate care of an individual with a learning disability. The role of learning disability nursing should be celebrated and valued for the highly skilled, compassionate role that it is. Wales needs more pre-registration learning disability nurse and a career pathway for learning disability nurses to become advance nurse practitioners, clinical nurse specialists and consultant nurses'. The number of commissioned learning disability nursing places has remained static at a mere 77 a year since 2018/2019. Wales has also only had 1 learning disability nurse consultant since 2016. – this urgently needs to change.

¹ Public Health Wales, 2021, *COVID-19-related deaths in Wales amongst People with Learning Disabilities from 1st March to 19th November 2020*, <https://phw.nhs.wales/publications/publications1/covid-19-related-deaths-in-wales-amongst-people-with-learning-disabilities-from-1st-march-to-19th-november-2020/>, [accessed 10 September 2021]

² National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, 2016.

