



# Health and Social Care Committee

## Inquiry into the contribution of community pharmacy to health services in Wales

CP 1 - NUS Wales

### **Evidence to the Health and Social Care Committee on the contribution of community pharmacies toward health and wellbeing services in Wales**

#### **Background on NUS Wales**

NUS Wales is a federation of local student organisations in Wales, comprising 30 local campus student organisations that are affiliated to the National Union of Students of the United Kingdom (NUS). NUS Wales is an autonomous, but integral, part of the National Union of Students.

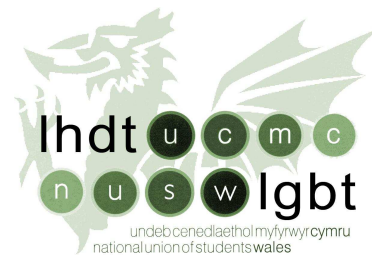
Our role is to represent policies set by the students' unions in membership of NUS Wales whose views are an expression of the opinions of the students on their campuses. Therefore, NUS Wales represents the views and wishes of all matriculated students attending affiliated further and higher institutions. While membership is open to private education providers, the current makeup of our membership when referring to further education relates to matriculated students at all colleges in Wales including part-time, privately financing or work-based learners.

Therefore, while NUS Wales can speak with authority on the views of students in colleges and universities, we can only speculate as to the needs and wishes of students attending other education providers. If there is a will for NUS Wales to provide a service to those currently not in membership, further discussion will need to take place with the relevant body to ensure appropriate boundaries are in place.

NUS Wales works with our members to promote defend and extend the rights of students in Wales. We aim to develop and support the experience of students attending universities and colleges in Wales. We are a key stakeholder in the development of public policy and engage in positive and proactive activities to promote the wellbeing of all students.

Together with our members we work to promote positive engagement of students within the student movement and beyond. Students' unions affiliated to NUS retain autonomy over all policy areas. NUS Wales operates a democratic forum for policy and debate on national issues affecting students and NUS Wales' role is to reflect the collective position.

NUS Wales has been working with stakeholders in the higher and further education sector since 1974 and is well established as the voice of students in Wales.



## **Background on the LGBT campaign**

The NUS Wales LGBT Campaign is a body within the National Union of Students Wales and covers 30 Further Education and Higher Education Institutions. The NUS Wales LGBT Campaign is made up of a democratically elected officer and committee who were elected at the annual conference held in the spring term. The LGBT Campaign exists as a representative body and support base for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans students in institutions in Wales. As the voice of LGBT students in Wales we aim to ensure that during their time of study students receive the best possible support and enjoy the same quality of student experience as all students. This includes ensuring that they can live without any discrimination based on their sexuality or gender identity.

## **Representation by the LGBT campaign**

Qualitative feedback from our members suggest that LGBT sexual health information is not readily available in rural areas despite legislative requirements outlined under the Equality Act 2010, especially sections 26 and 29 of the Act which deal with harassment and service provision respectively. We understand that it is the intention of the Act that such literature should be readily available for LGBT people.

### How is the lack of provision affecting students?

It is widely evidenced that the majority of the student population is sexually active. This is also true of LGBT people however the information available in more rural areas of Wales does not adequately cover the needs of LGBT students, therefore leading to a potential increase in unsafe activities. The students represented by the LGBT campaign cover all age ranges and attend courses in both further and higher education institutions throughout Wales. Many of these institutions are in rural areas where LGBT support and resources are non-existent. This is probably true also of the broader LGBT community in these areas, which is left without the appropriate level of support, leading to potential health risks in terms of both sexual health and broader well-being.

The Sexual Health and Wellbeing Action plan for Wales 2010-2015 states: *"In times of economic pressures, it is important to note that preventing [...] STIs provides a high rate of return to the NHS."* It further states that *"There are numerous providers and sources of information on sexual health targeting different groups. It is essential that this type of information and advice is appropriately tailored for its target audience and is available in accessible formats. Social marketing techniques can provide an effective way of ensuring that sexual health messages are targeted at the right audience, in the right place, at the right time, and by the right method."*

*Relationships and sexual health are an important aspect of general wellbeing. Where appropriate, opportunities to promote and integrate the benefits of positive sexual relationships in wider wellbeing messages should be sought.*

*The Welsh Assembly Government funds the National Information and Advice Project for 11-25 year olds, ClicOnline ([www.cliconline.co.uk](http://www.cliconline.co.uk)) and will work with it to maximise its potential as a means of providing accessible sexual health information."*



Whereas the introduction of a dedicated web portal is a useful source of information, it is grossly insufficient. In practice the level of information available to students in more rural parts of Wales are still inappropriate for LGBT students particularly and this partly seems to stem from a clear lack of understanding of the actual needs of LGBT people. A more tailored approach is therefore required.

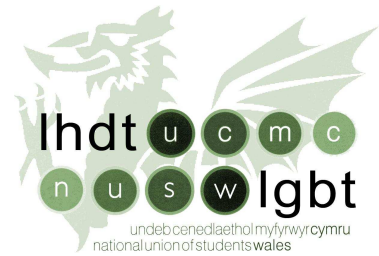
### Suggestions and Ways Forward

Community pharmacies are located all across Wales and are best placed to provide frontline support, advice and information where specific resources and care are not available elsewhere. It is essential therefore that community pharmacies provide well being and sexual health information both for heterosexuals and LGBT people to facilitate targeted distribution of information Wales-wide. This in turn would contribute to reducing the risk posed by STIs/STDs in Wales, especially amongst LGBT people.

The services provided need to follow a number of recommendations:

- Sexual Health Information – Hetero-normative sexual health information is readily available but we also need LGBT specific sexual health information. This information needs to be broad so that the information available can accommodate Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans people. Rural areas are also lacking sexual health clinics and it is hoped these could be organised via community pharmacies.
- Smear Recommendations – There is evidence of misperception amongst lesbian communities in Wales that smear test is not something that they require due to erroneous information provided by GPs. This is a worrying fact that needs to be addressed through appropriate training and information via GP surgeries and community pharmacies.
- Contraception – Condoms are readily available and free from many places around Wales. Oral dams and other forms of contraception required for LGBT people however are not advertised as much and not available in many places throughout Wales. We are calling for community pharmacies to start providing such contraception free of charge or at a minor cost or at least to display information about how to access these methods of contraception.
- Staff Training – There seems to be an obvious lack of understanding of the needs of LGBT people generally. It is essential for staff in community pharmacies to receive appropriate training in order that they understand the importance of a right to confidentiality, as well as being prepared for specific questions LGBT people might have in relation to sexual health and well being more generally. This requires a basic understanding of where the issues differ from heterosexual issues.
- Confidentiality - Studies have shown that LGBT people fear that by using local services, in rural areas in particular, there is a chance that their right to confidentiality will not be protected, due to judgmental attitudes or indiscretions. It is necessary that all local pharmacies ensure that total privacy is offered to those people who are LGBT and that no assumptions are made about their sexuality.

Call for additional research



A study released by Stonewall and UCLAN called Inside Out outlines generic issues with regards to access to health care and specifically sexual health for LGBT people in Wales.

Respondents stated "Access to Oral Dams is hard ... we had to beg the GUM clinic to get them"

The paper recommends:

- appropriate access to health care needs of LGB individuals
- increased literature on same sex orientation issues available in the health care setting
- for NHS Wales to increase access to specific sexual health services for LGB people

Anecdotal evidence from Welsh students also indicates that there are a number of issues that are not currently addressed with regards to sexual health for LGBT students. The language in the *Sexual Health and Wellbeing Action plan for Wales 2010-2015* itself seems to mainly target issues faced by heterosexual people, other than in relation to HIV, which seems awfully short-sighted.

There is a clear feeling that this gap has not been sufficiently investigated and that the impact on the well being of LGBT students on the one hand; and potential down cost on the NHS on the other need to be looked into specifically for LGBT people.

#### Further information

Welsh Government Action Plan

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/health/improvement/index/sexualhealth/?lang=en>

Stonewall report

[http://www.stonewall.org.uk/cymru/english/what\\_we\\_do/research\\_and\\_policy/in\\_sideout\\_project/default.asp](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/cymru/english/what_we_do/research_and_policy/in_sideout_project/default.asp)

Reports produced by NUS on the scope of healthcare issues amongst LGBT students

<http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/lgbt/LGBT-Healthcare-Briefing-on-Domestic-Violence/>

<http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/lgbt/Hidden-Marks-LBT/>