



Russell George MS
Chair, Health and Social Care Committee

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28 March 2023

Dear Russell

Thank you for your letter of 28 February regarding the Chief Nursing Officer's committee scrutiny session on 26 January. It is valuable to see in writing the issues raised in that session, on which the committee is most focussed.

With regards the **nursing workforce**, the CNO reflected what has been clear for some time, and what I have acknowledged many times in the Senedd - that the NHS and its workforce is currently experiencing the biggest challenge of its 75-year existence. The World Health Organisation estimates that nursing and midwifery vacancies currently represent more than 50% of the global shortage of health workers. That is why I see it as vitally important to solve some of the underlying causes also highlighted in your letter.

You have made reference to the recently published *National Workforce Implementation Plan* and I would similarly refer to that document, for the immediate plans on the issues raised in your letter.

On staff **retention**, HEIW has committed to delivering a retention plan by April 2023 which will shed more light on the national direction in that area. I am sure we are equally keen to review that document.

There is competition even from within the UK where England showed with their latest data published a vacancy rate of 10.8% within the Registered Nursing staff group (43,619 vacancies). This is an increase from the same period the previous year when the vacancy rate was 10.2% (39,721 vacancies).

With regards **recruitment**, the plan mentions consultation on a refreshed NHS Wales bursary scheme, a refreshed and enhanced attraction and recruitment campaign by HEIW, the second phase of our international recruitment scheme, modernising recruitment processes and increasing work-based learning to widen access.

I am resolved to making NHS careers as attractive as possible and I appreciate that as part of this there is a need to modernise job roles and employment models to better reflect the lives and desires of our staff in the 21st century. To that end, the plan commits the Welsh Government, by July 2023, to commissioning work to develop new **flexible employment** and contract options that better suit those who wish to work in primary and community sectors. This will be an important first step in that journey.

On the **use of agency staff**, the CNO is right to describe current expenditure as exceptional. There is almost certainly a causal link between the exceptional circumstances brought about by the pandemic and the exceptional use of agency staff, however it is clearly not sustainable or fiscally prudent. I am determined to dramatically reduce reliance on agency expenditure, and I expect the work of Effective Use of Resources Group, mentioned in your letter, to yield tangible results in this area.

I fully agree with the importance the CNO places on the **wellbeing of the workforce** and this is a clear thread running through the National Workforce Implementation Plan, intersecting with many of its facets. Specifically, there are commitments for Welsh Government to work with partners to deliver on the staff welfare project in social partnership to enhance staff wellbeing; HEIW to require NHS organisations to review results of the NHS Wales Staff survey and assess how systems, policies and procedures can positively contribute to workforce health and wellbeing; and Welsh Government to roll out an individualised Workforce Wellbeing Conversation Guide based on pilot related data to proactively understand and address workforce needs.

You have already referred in your letter to the commitment in the plan to publish NHS Wales vacancy **data** by June 2023. I have been clear it is unacceptable for us to be the only country in the UK not to do so and I am glad the technical issues which have prevented it to this point are being surmounted.

As for the **Nurse Staffing Levels (Wales) Act 2016**, the CNO is quite right to point out there is a tension between the uni-professional nature of the Act and the need for a more fundamentally multi-professional approach to workforce planning in the future. I understand the committee is planning post-legislative scrutiny of the Act for this summer/autumn which I welcome and I am positive that will be a central point within that scrutiny exercise.

Yours sincerely,



Eluned Morgan AS/MS

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