**Recording the language choice of patients**

Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board has developed an electronic resource that facilitates recording the language choice of inpatients

September 2024

**Background**

Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board has developed an innovative way to record patients' language choice electronically as part of its arrangements to deal with the flow of patients through its hospitals. They have developed a system of digital electronic whiteboards, which is a visual system to display and share information about inpatients, between departments, specialties and social care providers.

**What prompted the change?**

The Welsh language standards place a duty on the Health Board to ask an inpatient if they wish to use Welsh to communicate with the Health Board and to inform their staff who are likely to communicate with the patient that they wish to use Welsh.

Previously, the Health Board was dependent on paper records when recording and sharing information about patients' language choice. It was necessary to use various methods to record the patient's language choice, such as noting it in medical records, on other record systems or by using bedside cards or magnets.

The Health Board realised that it needed a more effective way to record and share the language choice of patients on the hospital wards. A visual, and more organised method of dealing with the flow of patients was needed to record and share relevant information about them, such as speech and language requirements, dietary needs or also a linguistic need.

**How does the electronic whiteboard work?**

A digital system of electronic whiteboards was developed to keep details of patients on the wards. As well as general information about the patient, it also clearly indicates the patient's language choice to the service providers. The system enables administrative and clinical staff to record that a patient is a Welsh speaker by using the Welsh flag symbol and the title *'Welsh Speaker'*. The information is visible on a large white e-board on the ward for everyone to see.

Llun yn cynnwys testun, llun sgrin, meddalwedd, eicon cyfrifiadur

Wedi cynhyrchu’r disgrifiad yn awtomatigLlun yn cynnwys testun, llun sgrin, meddalwedd, eicon cyfrifiadur

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At the beginning the Health Board held a consultation on the form of the Welsh symbol and decided to use the Welsh flag. This has the advantage that the symbol is unlikely to be confused with the one relating to speech and language problems.

The system is being used on the majority of the Health Board's wards. The large screen shows the beds on the ward clearly indicating the details of the patients.

The system enables the following:

* Those staff on the ward who speak Welsh can see the preferred language and communicate with that patient in Welsh, without having to ask the patient what their preferred language is. This therefore facilitates the proactive offer
* Clinical staff who rotate through the ward, for example medical and therapy staff, can see that the patient speaks Welsh and use Welsh with them. This can be very useful if there is a shortage of permanent Welsh speaking staff on the ward such as nursing staff
* You can also search by symbol, so you could search for any Welsh speakers who have been accepted throughout the system. This information could be used to arrange appropriate care
* The whiteboard is also connected to the Electronic Transfer of Care Record system, and the question about the patient's language choice must be answered before it can be completed. This makes it more likely that it will be possible to inform social care of the patient's language needs.

**What training did staff require?**

Regular training is given to staff on the system by ICT staff.

Staff are provided with a guide on the system which explains how the system fits in with the overall patient flow process. It also offers guidance and further background information.

The Health Board has adopted a policy for the proactive offer on inpatient wards. The policy covers Standard 23, 23A and 24. This has enabled the Health Board to include information about the electronic whiteboards in the policy as part of a protocol, with the consent of the Executive Director for Nursing following a meeting of the Quality and Safety Committee.

**What are the advantages?**

Language choice can be easily recorded across the system and therefore ensures that the Welsh language services are offered proactively.

An audit can be carried out on the system, and since its gradual implementation since 2022, the choice and language needs of approximately 60 vulnerable patients have been recorded. There is no doubt that this has led to a higher use of Welsh with the patients. It is anticipated that this will increase as the electronic whiteboards are implemented on each ward.

**Were there any challenges to overcome?**

The Health Board has not experienced any oppositions or obstacles to the new system.

It is necessary to continue to remind staff of the need to record on the electronic whiteboards even though the language choice might already be recorded on the Welsh Nursing Care Record (WNCR). Because the electronic whiteboards are an internal system, it is essential that language choice is recorded on these as well, as well as on this national system, in order to see the advantages explained above. It is hoped that it will be possible to connect the electronic whiteboards with national systems in due course.

**What advise would you give an organisation who want to improve their methods of recording language choice?**

Where technology is used to administer services of any kind, the ability to record language choice must be included. This is essential to be able to offer Welsh language services and provision proactively. If we want to an increase in the use of the Welsh language and Welsh language services, staff and service users must be encouraged to change their habits that are well established. This is especially true for vulnerable people. Facilitating the proactive offer is therefore essential and recording language choice is part of that.

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