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Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol  
Bae Abertawe  
Swansea Bay University  
Health Board

Cadeirydd/Chair: **Emma Woollett**  
Prif Weithredwr/Chief Executive: **Tracy Myhill**

**gofalu am ein gilydd, cydweithio, gwella bob amser**  
**caring for each other, working together, always improving**

Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn y Gymraeg ac yn y Saesneg. We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

Dyddiad/Date: 8<sup>th</sup> July 2020  
Ein Cyf / Our Ref: 20-F-006

01639 648363



FOIA.Requests@wales.nhs.uk

Corporate Services  
Headquarters  
1 Talbot Gateway  
Baglan  
Port Talbot, SA12 7BR

Dear

I refer to your Freedom of Information Act Request acknowledged by ourselves on 5<sup>th</sup> June 2020. Your request sought information relating to COVID-19 and cancer treatment.

**1) What progress has been made to develop COVID-protected sites where cancer treatment and diagnostic tests can be performed as safely as possible?**

The Health Board's response to the Covid-19 pandemic has been guided by the statutory requirements and guidance on Emergency Preparedness, Resilience and Response and the national guidance specific to the pandemic.

The Health Board, like all NHS organisation recognises, and is adjusting to, the reality that for the foreseeable future the local and national health and care system and operating model will need to support an ongoing albeit fluctuating demand from COVID, an ongoing demand for urgent and emergency care alongside delivery of non COVID planned urgent and routine care.

At an operational level there are solutions in place in all hospital sites for zoning of "red and green" areas. There is an inherent challenge to the language of "green" i.e. COVID free, and the expectation it may create for patients and staff. The reality is that COVID-free services or environments cannot be 100% guaranteed and so the focus has been on mitigating the risks whilst recognising and accepting that a level of risk will remain. These issues



**Pencadlys BIP Bae Abertawe, Un Porthfa Talbot, Port Talbot, SA12 7BR / Swansea Bay UHB Headquarters, One Talbot Gateway, Port Talbot, SA12 7BR**

Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol Bae Abertawe yw enw gweithredu Bwrdd Iechyd Lleol Prifysgol Bae Abertawe  
Swansea Bay University Health Board is the operational name of Swansea Bay University Local Health Board

are central to revised pre-operative and consent processes are key in the consent process.

Capacity for surgical and diagnostic services have been incrementally increased since April in order to increase provision for cancer and other urgent patients.

Planning for cancer provision continues and plans will be updated in response to the recently issued guidance "A Framework for Cancer Recovery" – please see attached Appendix.

## **2) Which cancer treatments have been disrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic?**

All cancer treatments have to some extent have been effected from impact from the COVID-19 pandemic, however teams and departments have adapted rapidly to provide services in different ways to support patients and their families.

Whilst it is very clear that there may well be further COVID-19 surges, we recognise we also need to minimise the harm to patients with cancer as a result of delayed presentation and reduced access to diagnostic tests and treatment.

We continue to provide Systemic Anti-Cancer Therapy (Chemotherapy). Some in-patient treatments were deferred for three weeks, but these have now resumed and our chemotherapy capacity is currently running at 70% of pre-COVID-19 capacity. Please note that the reduction in activity was multifactorial. It includes non-attendance due to patient choice during the COVID-19 pandemic, reduction in new patient referrals, safety measures that have had to be put in place to align with National Guidance to protect both our vulnerable patients and our members of staff and alignment with National Treatment Guidance which you can view here: <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/NG161>.

Three out of four of our LINAC (Linear Accelerator) devices are up and running and we have extended working days on those machines to provide radiotherapy services. This is also being supplemented with some outsourcing to the Rutherford Cancer Centre. Radiotherapy treatments are therefore ongoing for all priority levels except prostate patients, who are being deferred with hormone cover, and radiotherapy for breast cancer patients reduced to 5 sessions where appropriate and in line with national guidelines.

We have been re-introducing theatre capacity at both Morriston and Singleton Hospitals with surgical activity increasing week on week across all tumour sites. We are also undertaking surgery in our Plastic Surgery Treatment Centre. Our teams work together in producing a prioritised list of cancer patients to ensure optimal use of theatre capacity. Levels of COVID-19 demand on ITU capacity, along with cohorting of COVID-19 ITU capacity in our ITU surge capacity, has resulted in greater post-operative ITU capacity for cancer patients.



### 3) What plans does the Health Board have to address the growing backlog in cancer referrals and treatments?

As you may be aware the number of cancer referrals decreased dramatically during the peak of COVID-19. Welsh Government reported a 70% decrease in cancer referrals in May. Referrals are now starting to increase.

We are working hard to understand the multiple factors behind these reductions in referral rates and to consider what further actions can be taken to reduce risks of harm. To ensure they are kept informed, we have communicated the status of our Cancer Services with leaders in Primary Care and run some communication campaigns to complement the national campaign on cancer

Plans to increase both surgical and diagnostic capacity to address backlog are under constant review and refinement, examples include:

- Cancer cases being undertaken at Sancta Maria hospital (given the hospital's facilities, the case mix is limited to patients who do not require post-operative ITU/HDU care);
- Some sarcoma patients being operated on at Spire;
- Regional work with Hywel Dda on tertiary gynaecology and urology patients;
- Appropriate prostate and bladder patients are outsourced to the Rutherford Cancer Centre; and,
- Work with Cardiff in relation to potential shared lists for thoracic surgery patients
- Detailed plan for the increase in endoscopy capacity
- Work with Swansea University to access CT and MR capacity in the university

In addition, we have a patient portal for surgical patients who may have had treatment delayed or changed, and additional information will be available from next week providing pre-rehabilitation advice to support patients to maximise their health and well-being whilst preparing for treatment. Patients are also signposted to the Health Board Macmillan Cancer Information and Support services to access non-clinical advice and support. Patients can still contact their clinical team and cancer clinical nurse specialist if needed through the usual points of contact.

A directory of third sector cancer support groups has been developed and shared with all the Cancer Clinical Nurse Specialists across the Health Board.

I hope this information is helpful. If you require anything further please contact us at [FOIA.Requests@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:FOIA.Requests@wales.nhs.uk).

Under the terms of the Health Board's Freedom of Information policy, individuals seeking access to recorded information held by the Health Board are entitled to request internal review of the handling of their requests. If you would like to complain about the Health Board's handling of your request please contact me directly at the address below or register your complaint via [FOIA.Requests@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:FOIA.Requests@wales.nhs.uk).

If after Internal Review you remain dissatisfied you are also entitled to refer the matter to the information commissioner at the Information Commissioner's Office (Wales), 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Churchill House, Churchill Way, Cardiff, CF10 2HH. Telephone Number: 029 2067 8400.

Yours sincerely



P. a. wenger

Pam Wenger  
**Director of Corporate Governance**

