

Inquiry into the Covid-19 outbreak on health and social care in Wales

Hafal's Preliminary Response

*Note: Hafal's immediate concern – and the reason why we are making this preliminary response - is **to ensure that during the Covid-19 outbreak patients and families affected by serious mental illness can access a sufficient service and so are kept safe.** It will also be important to hold the national leadership of health and social care in Wales to account, together with local delivery by Health Boards, local authorities and others, and to learn lessons: we will make a further response to the Inquiry on this in due course.*

1 About us

1.1 Hafal is a charity and company limited by guarantee which speaks for people in Wales with a serious mental illness (including schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and other conditions involving psychosis or loss of insight), their families and carers, and for a wider group of vulnerable people for whom we provide services.

1.2 Hafal is governed by our Members – about 1,000 people who are mainly service-users and carers – who elect our Trustees who are themselves mainly users and carers. We manage services in all 22 counties of Wales and also facilitate 232 carers support meetings each year. Together these services support over 6,000 service users and carers every year. Many of our 420 staff also have experience of mental illness or as carers.

1.3 Hafal has put in place local and national plans to manage the impact of coronavirus on our services, ensuring vital support is maintained while also keeping everyone as safe as possible. We are also delivering **Hafal's Promise** – our pledge of lasting contact and friendship – across Wales, and we have seen a 100% rise in the number people taking us up on our Promise within the last month. [Read more about Hafal's response to the pandemic here.](#)

2 Response

2.1 Hafal is concerned that people with a serious mental illness are being let down and put at risk. We understand that services have needed to be scaled back but patients need to know what minimum service is on offer is how they can access it; and that service needs to function effectively. We note that the Welsh Government has published advice on the general mental health and wellbeing of people during the pandemic but this is not the subject of this response.

2.2 On 8 April 2020 Hafal launched a survey to gather feedback on the impact of the recent coronavirus outbreak on people's mental health in Wales, and their experience of mental health services. The survey,



which was completed by over 300 participants from across the country, reveals that while the mental health of 74% of respondents has been negatively affected by the coronavirus outbreak, nearly two thirds (63%) had been unable to access their GP in the previous two weeks.

- Almost half of respondents (46%) had not been informed about what is happening with mental health services in their area, and 37% had services cancelled within the previous fortnight. 14% had experienced difficulties in getting hold of their Community Mental Health Team, and 44% had not been informed about what they should do or who to contact if their mental health deteriorates or they experience a crisis.
- Responses to the survey included:

“I booked an ‘emergency appointment’ (in January) for the middle of March, this was cancelled by telephone, until further notice, three hours before I was due to be there.”

“My review was cancelled. I had a lot I wanted to discuss and don’t know when it will be rescheduled.”

“My partner’s ECT has been cancelled because of this Covid-19. He has become very low and is depressed and suicidal. Spoken to the CMHT but they said it can’t be helped it’s the virus?”

“My CPN has left. I don’t know who my new one is and not heard from anyone.”

[Read more about the survey here.](#)

2.3 Hafal’s Chair Mair Elliott wrote to the Health Minister in April expressing our concerns, stating:

“As Chair of mental health charity Hafal I am writing to you urgently to express my grave concerns about the safety of the most vulnerable mental health patients and their carers and families in Wales during the coronavirus outbreak and to seek your assurance that their safety will not be compromised.

“We are witnessing the almost complete disappearance of CMHT support, early discharge from inpatient units, and closure of inpatient units with major reconfiguration of services seemingly focused on dementia beds.

“We need a guarantee that services will keep patients and their families and carers safe in these difficult times.”

[Read more on this correspondence here.](#)

2.4 We are concerned that the Welsh Government has not instructed or advised Local Health Boards and local authorities on what **minimum service** should be maintained, and it has not set out any **national standards** for minimum service delivery aside from conformity with the law (which should hardly need stating to public bodies).



2.5 The Welsh Government has told us that local contingency plans by Local Health Boards should include details of what will be provided as a minimum service. We have not seen these plans and nor of course have patients. We are sceptical about whether the plans do in fact set out what minimum service will be provided: our impression is that local planning has revolved around suspension and closure of services and has not included any clarity about what basic services will remain in place.

3 Actions which would help right now

- ***The Welsh Government should set out national minimum standards for what service must be maintained for people with a serious mental illness during the pandemic***
- ***Local Health Boards should publish their contingency plans now and give guidance to people with a serious mental illness on what services are available and how to access them***
- ***National standards and the local availability of services should be revised regularly - flexing with the demands of the pandemic on the NHS and others – and people with a serious mental illness should be advised accordingly***

4 Contact

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