

Welsh Government

Consultation Document

NHS Staffing Statistics

Date of issue: **30 August 2011**

Action required: Responses by **11 October 2011**

Overview

The Welsh Government is seeking views from users on the proposal to discontinue the six-monthly release 'NHS Staff Vacancies' and any other views about NHS staffing statistics.

How to respond

The closing date for replies is 11 October 2011. You can reply in any of the following ways:-

Electronically

Complete the electronic version of the questionnaire at

https://spreadsheets.google.com/spreadsheet/viewform?hl=en_US&formkey=dHd4ekpReWxZSW1ZUXdMNndiN2FQUIE6MQ#gid=0

By post

Print the questionnaire from the above link, complete it, and return it to:-

Robin Jones

Health Statistics & Analysis Unit

Statistical Directorate

Welsh Government

Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF10 3NQ

Further information and related documents

Large print, Braille and alternate language versions of this document are available on request.

Contact details

For further information please contact Robin Jones on 029 2082 3625.

Email: stats.healthinfo@wales.gsi.gov.uk

Data protection

How the views and information you give us will be used

Any response you send us will be seen in full by Welsh Government staff dealing with the issues which this consultation is about. It may also be seen by other Welsh Government staff to help them plan future consultations. The Welsh Government intends to publish a summary of the responses to this document. We may also publish responses in full. Normally, the name and address (or part of the address) of the person or organisation who sent the response are published with the response. This helps to show that the consultation was carried out properly. If you do not want your name or address published, please tell us this in writing when you send your response. We will then blank them out. Names or addresses we blank out might still get published later, though we do not think this would happen very often. The Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 allow the public to ask to see information held by many public bodies, including the Welsh Government. This includes information which has not been published. However, the law also allows us to withhold information in some circumstances. If anyone asks to see information we have withheld, we will have to decide whether to release it or not. If someone has asked for their name and address not to be published, that is an important fact we would take into account. However, there might sometimes be important reasons why we would have to reveal someone's name and address, even though they have asked for them not to be published. We would get in touch with the person and ask their views before we finally decided to reveal the information.

Background

Information on NHS staffing is important to effective management of resources in the NHS and planning in the Welsh Government.

In order to support this, the Welsh Government's Statistical Directorate collects, analyses and disseminates data on many aspects of NHS staffing in Wales, and promotes its use as part of the evidence base in the development and monitoring of policy. The data published by the Statistical Directorate is also used by other users such as local authorities and health organisations to help plan and monitor services, and benchmark performance on NHS staffing in Wales.

Where are we now?

The Statistical Directorate collects and publishes the following information on NHS staffing:

- Staff directly employed by the NHS (annual)
- NHS Staff Vacancies (every six months)
- Sickness absence in the NHS (quarterly)

These statistics published by the Welsh Government can be accessed online: www.wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/health2011/?lang=en

There are additional NHS staffing statistics available in the annual Health Statistics Wales publication (Chapter 14). Also see the Additional Tables for several tables on staff directly employed by the NHS, by gender, age group, nature of contract and ethnicity, and also the number of locum staff. www.wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/publications/health2011/?lang=en

As priorities evolve, there may be a need to obtain evidence on different aspects of NHS staffing that are not already covered by existing data collections and publications. In a time of constrained resources, it is not possible to take on new data collections in addition to the existing suite of collections, nor would this be welcomed by data providers who may be facing similar resource constraints. Instead, the current range of collections needs to be reviewed in order to identify whether some of the information that is currently collected could be no longer collected centrally at all. This would free up some resources to address new priorities for NHS staffing statistics. We would also hope that it would reduce some of the burden on data providers.

Proposals for change

We have received feedback from Local Health Boards that the NHS staff vacancies publication is not very useful to them, and doesn't reflect the current staffing and recruitment situation in the NHS. For this and other reasons, the proposal that we are putting forward is to stop the data collection and publication on NHS Staff Vacancies (posts vacant for three months or more). Further information is provided on this proposal on the following pages.

The purpose of this consultation is to seek users' views on this proposal and our other NHS staffing statistics. Your contributions will help us to understand the impact these changes could have on the individuals and organisations that use these statistics. The outcome of this consultation will inform our priorities for the years ahead.

The consultation will run for 6 weeks rather than the usual 12 week period due to timing. If as a result of the consultation we found that the NHS staff vacancies data collection did need to continue, a 12 week consultation would not allow us enough time to do the next data collection in time for publication in March 2012.

We will consider user views in full, as in a period of restricted resources, we need to be able to prioritise our activities. This is in line with the Official Statistics Code of Practice which states that effective user engagement is fundamental both to trust in statistics and securing maximum public value.

What outcomes do we expect?

If the proposal in the consultation are agreed, we may be able to take on data collection and publication of other NHS staffing statistics. We will need to keep existing collections under review to ensure that they remain relevant and continue to collect good quality information.

We will publish a summary of consultation responses soon after the consultation closes, with details of actions we will take in light of those responses to follow. This will be available through

www.wales.gov.uk/consultations/statistics/

Proposal: Stop the data collection and publication on NHS Staff Vacancies (posts vacant for three months or more)

Background

The data collection and publication for NHS Staff Vacancies has been running for ten years. NHS organisations in Wales provide information every six months on the number of NHS staff posts that have been vacant for three months or more.

The information is published in a six-monthly statistical release which is used by the Welsh Government and the NHS to monitor trends in NHS staff posts vacant for three months or more.

The latest statistical release is published alongside this consultation and is available at www.wales.gov.uk/statistics

What specific changes are we proposing?

We are proposing to stop collecting information on NHS staff vacancies (posts vacant for three months or more). This could be implemented for the next edition of the release (this would usually be in March 2012).

The evidence for change

The data collection on NHS staff vacancies was set up in 2001 to monitor the large number of posts that were vacant for three months or more (1,400 at 31 March 2001 and a peak of over 1,700 at 31 March 2002). However, the number of posts vacant has declined substantially to less than 100 in recent years. While this data collection was useful ten years ago to highlight problems in recruitment that need to be addressed, the relatively small number of vacancies in recent years means this information is not as useful now. We have received similar feedback from NHS organisations in Wales.

In the current financial climate, NHS organisations are reducing the number of posts so the number of vacancies is not as relevant. This has been seen in the past two statistical releases as Cardiff & Vale University Local Health Board (LHB) have not provided figures to us. The LHB reports that currently, posts becoming vacant are not being filled through external recruitment, except for certain critical clinical positions. The LHB therefore considers that it is misleading to report any vacancies, as the LHB is not actively trying to fill posts.

We collect data on the number of posts vacant for three months or more at the dates 31 March and 30 September each year. The recruitment process for some staffing positions (such as medical and dental) takes much longer than for some other posts, so the number of medical and dental posts vacant isn't indicative that these posts are more difficult to recruit to than others.

Analysis of the web hits for this statistical release suggests that it is not as widely used as other health statistics releases. We also rarely receive any queries or requests in relation to this data.

If the information on NHS staff vacancies were no longer collected centrally, individual NHS organisations would still have access to their own management information and could use it for planning purposes in their organisation.

There is a similar situation regarding publication of NHS staff vacancies in England. Their annual statistics have not been published in 2011 pending the Fundamental Review of NHS data collections. See the NHS Information Centre for Health and Social Care website for more information:
<http://www.ic.nhs.uk/statistics-and-data-collections/workforce>

All of this evidence leads us to believe that there is not a strong user need for this information to be collected centrally.

Specific consultation questions:

- *Do you agree with the proposal?*
- *What are your reasons for this, including any impact this change might have on your work?*