

WELSH HEALTH CIRCULAR



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Title: Good Practice Guidance on the Provision of Mental Health Support for Asylum Seekers and Refugees Dispersed to Wales

Date of Expiry / Review Not applicable

For Action by:

Health Board Vice Chairs
Directors of Primary, Community Care
and Mental Health
Adult Mental Health Clinical Leads
CAMHS Clinical Leads
Primary Care Leads
General Practice
Mental Health Professionals

Action required by: 27 February 2017

Sender: Dr Sarah Watkins, Head of Mental Health & Vulnerable Groups Division

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Enclosure(s): *Good Practice Guidance on the Provision of Mental Health Support for Asylum Seekers and Refugees Dispersed to Wales*



Health Board Vice Chairs
Directors of Primary, Community Care
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CAMHS Clinical Leads

Our Ref/Your Ref:

February 2017

Dear Colleague

PROVISION OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES TO REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

In recent weeks Welsh Government has made available £40,000 to commission psychological trauma training for staff in both Adult and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services in order to manage trauma in refugee and asylum seekers.

I understand the training has been commissioned and will commence shortly. An objective has been to ensure equitable access for appropriate health board staff, though with an emphasis on staff in health boards which cover refugee and asylum seeker dispersal areas. This will ensure sufficient staff with the necessary skills to meet the mental health needs of both adults and children.

As a result of this development it is now appropriate for health boards to consider how they provide mental health services to this cohort. To support health boards and ensure consistency of provision Welsh Government, working with health boards and other partners developed *Good Practice Guidance on the Provision of Mental Health Support for Asylum Seekers and Refugees Dispersed to Wales* (attached) in 2016. It describes the process and pathway which health boards now need to follow to ensure that mental health problems are identified and treated appropriately.

The guidance complements and should be used in conjunction with earlier guidance developed by Public Health Wales on:

- *Screening of New Entrants arriving via the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (VPRS): a brief guide for service providers in Wales* (2015); and
- *Access to NHS services by Asylum Seekers, Failed Asylum Seekers and Refugees; A brief guide for General Medical Practices (GMP's)* (2016).



In addition you will wish to be aware that we have undertaken to refresh the 2009 National Public Health Service for Wales: *Guidance on healthcare issues for asylum seekers in Wales*. The refresh will take account of the findings of the unpublished Public Health Wales 2013 *Review of healthcare for asylum seekers in Wales*, and the healthcare recommendations contained in the Welsh Government's 2016 *Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan*. A small group of health board and other key stakeholders is being established to support the refresh, which we hope will be completed quickly and finalised during the summer.

If you have any questions in relation to this letter please direct them to Jason Pollard (Jason.pollard@wales.gsi.gov.uk / tel: 02920823215) who is leading on this work.

Yours faithfully,

Dr Sarah Watkins

**Is-adran Grwpiau Iechyd Meddwl ac Agored i Niwed
Head of Mental Health & Vulnerable Groups Division**

**Uwch Swyddog Meddygol
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Good Practice Guidance on the Provision of Mental Health Support for Asylum Seekers and Refugees Dispersed to Wales

1. Asylum seekers and refugees dispersed within Wales will have received either an Initial Health Assessment undertaken by the Cardiff Health Access Practice (in the case of asylum seekers), or a Migration Health Assessment from the International Organisation for Migration (in the case of Syrian refugees) prior to their arrival in the dispersal area. In both cases, the assessment form will be provided in advance to the primary care practice where the individual(s) are to be registered. The assessment form will include information on any mental health problems identified during the initial assessment.
2. The primary care practice registering the asylum seeker or refugee as a patient should ensure as part of the patient registration, screening and assessment process that:
 - any mental health problems recorded in the individual's Initial Health Assessment, or Migration Health Assessment form are considered;
 - diagnosis is confirmed by an appropriate mental health assessment; and,
 - any necessary treatment is provided as it would be for any other patient either by the primary care team, or, if indicated, through referral to Local Primary Mental Health Support Services (LPMHSS), the Community Mental Health Team (CMHT) or Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS); and,
 - the appropriate read code is applied to record the patient's refugee or asylum seeker status.
3. Some asylum seekers and refugees may come from regions where cultural attitudes or understanding of mental health, and treatment, differ from those in the UK. This can sometimes mean that individuals are reluctant to discuss mental health issues or have a different understanding of what constitutes a mental health problem. It is important therefore that consideration of mental health issues during initial primary care assessments be undertaken in a culturally sensitive manner which recognises that these differences may exist. For example:
 - Where language support is required, it may be useful to establish when arranging the initial appointment whether the individual would prefer this to be provided by an interpreter from the Wales Interpretation and Translation Service who is not known to them, or from a friend, relative or member of the local community, and whether telephone or face-to-face interpretation would be preferred;
 - Ensuring the individual understands that conditions such as depression, anxiety or PTSD – and not just more severe psychotic disorders – are mental health issues which can be treated by the NHS through pharmacological and/or psychological approaches, and that in Wales no stigma is attached to mental health problems;
 - Signposting to organisations such as the Welsh Refugee Council who provide a range of support and advice in addition to that provided by the NHS, including peer support and mental health promotion.
4. The attached pathway describes the process which should be followed to ensure that mental health problems are identified and treated appropriately.

Good Practice Guidance on the Provision of Mental Health Support for Asylum Seekers and Refugees Dispersed to Wales

