

Updated GMS Access Position

In September 2021, the QS Committee received a report that provided an update on Access to General Medical Services (GMS). The Primary Community & Therapies Services Group (PCTSG) Access and Sustainability Forum, which includes representation from the Local Medical Committee (LMC) and Community Health Council, oversees a programme of work on access with a key purpose to drive forward improved and sustainable access within primary care across the Health Board area and is cognisant of the workload pressures faced by primary care in the face of increased demands for access to services and sustainability issues.

The following points were noted by the committee:

- The GMS contract does not specify the type of access model but does outline that the management of patients who believe themselves to be ill includes offering a consultation and, where appropriate physical examination for the purpose of identifying the need, if any, for treatment or further investigation.
- The Health Board had seen an increase in achievement across all the national GMS in-hours access standards during the first quarter (reported August 2021)
- The Community Health Council were at the time of the report undertaking a Telephone Access Survey across all 49 Practices.

GP access continues to be area of political and patient interest, and across Wales health boards are reporting increasing patient concerns about the ability to access a GP. The Access and Sustainability Forum provides a platform to review and monitor performance against the Access Standards, share best practice, and assist with the development of good access initiatives through primary care clusters.

In December 2021 the Access and Sustainability Forum agreed to a Task and Finish Group (TFG) being stood up with the aim of improving the User Experience in accessing GMS, informed by the recommendations made by the CHC in patient experience reports. The Group has identified a number of recommendations which could be realistically impacted in the next 6 months and have developed an action plan to support. This will be discussed and agreed at the next Access and Sustainability Forum.

Since the last update to the committee, the GMS Contractual Agreement has been issued which provides a tripartite public commitment to ensure:

- All patients who contact the practice will be treated equitably regardless of the method of contact used.
- Patients who telephone, will have their calls answered and care navigation undertaken. Where clinically appropriate, patients may be signposted to another service – the reasons for this will be clearly explained.
- Where access to a service is clinically appropriate, patients will be triaged and offered an appropriate consultation, at an appropriate time, without the need to ring back. This may mean that an appointment is booked in advance for a

date in the future but will be consistent with the patient's assessed clinical need.

- All patients will have the option to access their practice through a digital solution and will receive a similar service to those who choose a telephony route.
- Practices are open and transparent about the services offered, how to access them and how to access additional or alternative services when required.

The detail of this commitment which will result in new access standards for practices is currently being worked through nationally.