



GIG
CYMRU
NHS
WALES

Bwrdd Iechyd
Addysgu Powys
Powys Teaching
Health Board

Agenda item: 5.1

| EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE | | Date of Meeting: 7 August 2024 |
|---|--|---|
| Subject : | Proposal to establish Physician Associate roles in mental health in Powys Teaching Health Board | |
| Approved and Presented by: | Dr Kate Wright, Executive Medical Director | |
| Prepared by: | [REDACTED] Consultant Community Adult Psychiatrist | |
| Other Committees and meetings considered at: | N/A | |

| PURPOSE: | | |
|--|-------------------|--------------------|
| The purpose of this paper is to propose the establishment of Physician Associate (PA) roles across Powys Teaching Health Board. | | |
| RECOMMENDATION(S): | | |
| The Executive Committee are asked to: | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • APPROVE the development of up to two PA roles within mental health services in Powys Teaching Health Board. | | |
| Approval/Ratification/Decision¹ | Discussion | Information |
| ✓ | x | x |

| THE PAPER IS ALIGNED TO THE DELIVERY OF THE FOLLOWING STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE(S) AND HEALTH AND CARE STANDARD(S): | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|---|
| Strategic Objectives: | 1. Focus on Wellbeing | ✓ |
| | 2. Provide Early Help and Support | x |

¹ Equality Impact Assessment (EiA) must be undertaken to support all organisational decision making at a strategic level

| | | |
|----------------------------|--|---|
| | 3. Tackle the Big Four | ✓ |
| | 4. Enable Joined up Care | ✓ |
| | 5. Develop Workforce Futures | ✓ |
| | 6. Promote Innovative Environments | ✓ |
| | 7. Put Digital First | ✗ |
| | 8. Transforming in Partnership | ✗ |
| | | |
| Health and Care Standards: | 1. Staying Healthy | ✓ |
| | 2. Safe Care | ✓ |
| | 3. Effective Care | ✓ |
| | 4. Dignified Care | ✓ |
| | 5. Timely Care | ✓ |
| | 6. Individual Care | ✓ |
| | 7. Staff and Resources | ✓ |
| | 8. Governance, Leadership & Accountability | ✓ |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This paper sets out a proposal to establish up to two PA roles in mental health services in Powys. The proposal follows a decision by HEIW to establish a pathfinder project for extending the PA role in mental health services across NHS Wales. HEIW will fund the full-time salary costs for newly recruited PAs from December 2024 to March 2025 with additional funding for supervision and professional development. The roles, underpinned by good governance, could have an impact on the delivery of mental health services by ensuring robust multiprofessional working and seamless workforce models. There are several opportunities that this initiative could realise which will be outlined in the paper.

DETAILED BACKGROUND AND ASSESSMENT:

Introduction

The Physician Associate (PA) is trained member of the multi-professional team that works alongside the medical team and supervised by a senior doctor. The role of the PA is to assess patients with a range of health conditions, conduct relevant examinations, plan investigations within the bounds of their level of experience and propose and enact appropriate management plans with supervision. PAs can work in all clinical areas including primary care, medicine/surgical specialties and mental health. PAs have been practising in the UK since 2002 and in Wales since 2016. There are approximately 226 PAs working across primary and secondary care in NHS Wales.

There is an association between severe and enduring mental health conditions and poorer physical healthcare outcomes. It is estimated that mental health patients die between 15-20 years earlier than peers without mental disorders. Reasons are complex for this association and are related to the direct effects of mental disorders on physical health (increased rates of smoking, alcohol, illegal drugs), effects of certain psychotropic drugs (leading to weight gain, dyslipidaemia and glucose intolerance) and difficulties for mental health patients accessing healthcare. Parity of esteem for mental health patients and access to appropriate physical healthcare services has long been an ambition of those advocating for mental health patients.

PAs have been working in mental health services for several years and there is estimated to be approximately 200 PAs working across the UK in mental health. There are six PAs currently working in mental health services across NHS Wales, in Swansea Bay, Hywel Dda and Aneurin Bevan Health Boards. PA training is delivered by Swansea and Bangor universities. We train approximately 50 PAs per year to enter NHS Wales roles.

In March 2024 the Royal College of Psychiatrists wrote to all employers across the UK setting out its plans to set up a task and finish group. In the interim, the College has issued guidance for physician associates working in mental health settings. This compliments the review into PA's that the College is currently undertaking. There is further information on the review, [available here](#).

As part of the strategic mental health workforce plan for health and social care in Wales, there are several actions referencing the PA role including:

Action 1 – commissioning, including a dedicated cohort of PAs for mental health
Action 18 – development of all Wales resources for expanded and extended roles including PAs

Following the UK and Scottish Governments passing legislation, regulation for PAs and AAs by the GMC, will begin in December 2024. Issues currently related to requesting ionising radiological investigations and ultimately prescribing will be worked through following regulation.

As part of the PA recruitment process in 2024, HEIW, has proposed a pathfinder project to establish up to nine PA roles across mental health services in NHS Wales. The project will support 100% FTE salary costs from December 2024 (when PAs will join the workforce) to March 2025. Furthermore, funding is available to support education supervision costs. HEIW is also proposing the establishment of a professional development programme for new PAs and a community of practice. Health Boards submitting PA posts are requested to continue with funding of salary costs from April 2025, on a permanent, or at least for the following 18 months. Bids for posts have opened with a closing date of 14th August and a submission date (of posts to Trac, to enter the streamlining process), in early September.

Appropriate mental health settings identified for this proposal

Not all mental health settings would necessarily be appropriate for the initial development of the PA workforce across Powys Health Board. We propose to establish two PA roles in Brecon and Ystradgynlais CMHTs. The roles would also add an essential component to the single point of access mental health assessment team.

To enable safe and effective practice newly qualified PAs need to work in environments with robust multiprofessional support and direct access to a consultant or senior SAS doctor supervisor. Both proposed settings have well established teams with substantive consultant psychiatrists.

By working in the proposed CMHT settings, PAs can not only utilise their skills related to assessment and management of a range of physical health issues, but they can develop further competencies and literacy related to psychiatric history taking, assessment and management. Developing the PA role in mental health services will not only be a replacement of skills but the introduction of new skills, particularly in a multidisciplinary assessment setting as currently duty assessments don't frequently include individuals with medically related competencies.

An additional benefit of PAs working in these setting could be they allow more skilled members of the team to be released for more specialty work e.g. severe and enduring mental health conditions and neurodiversity assessments.

Supervision requirements

Senior doctors working in Powys are well versed in providing supervision to a variety of healthcare professionals in the MDT. The role supervising a PA is no different from any other healthcare professional and should be underpinned by effective educational principles. For the role of the PA to be successful the individual must receive appropriate supervision in the clinical setting by a named senior doctor (usually a Consultant or senior SAS doctor). Supporting Professional Activity (SPA) time should be built into job plans to ensure this happens. Such time is required to support the clinical development of qualified PAs, ensuring their ongoing development and that the requirements of the FPA/GMC are met.

The most appropriate supervision arrangements for a PA are determined by several factors, including their experience, the type of work they carry out/their individual scope of practice and their individual needs. PAs entering the mental health workforce in Powys would be newly qualified from Swansea/Bangor Universities and would need direct supervision until skills and competencies are further developed.

Continuing professional development

There are several educational principles that need to be considered for each new PA that begins work in Powys Health Board. These are:

- Comprehensive induction.

- Development of annual personal development plan.
- Opportunity to complete work based placed assessments aligned to PDP and set objectives in any given year.
- Opportunities to attend local/national education programmes.
- Appropriately funded study leave expenses.
- Opportunities to engage in activities affiliated to clinical work e.g. education, clinical governance.
- An annual review of education needs and competence.
- Annual appraisal to support the doctor to reflect on evidence mapped to the domains of Good Medical Practice (there is a current HEIW pilot ongoing exploring the use of MARS)

All of these will be developed further subject to ratification of this proposal.

PAs working in Powys mental health services - SWOT analysis

Strengths

Enhance the MDT – addition of new skills and skills development

Develop PA workforce in mental health aligned with mental health workforce plan

Provide continuity of care for mental health patients related to challenges around medical workforce recruitment and retention.

Weaknesses

Appropriate trained supervisor capacity. Both Brecon and Ystradgynlais have substantive consultants with broad supervision experience.

Opportunities

Alignment with mental health workforce plan

Improved patient outcomes including physical healthcare outcomes

Enhanced multidisciplinary assessments with the addition of professionals trained in the medical model

Enhanced training for trainee doctors and other MDT colleagues

When aligned to single point of access it would enable a release of Agency spend within the CMHT

Threats

Possibility of PAs feeling isolated (development of a network is needed).

Challenges with recruitment to rural areas in Wales.

PAs terms and conditions of service

PAs are employed through the agenda for change terms and conditions of service. Salary (including overtime and bank work), annual leave entitlement, sickness and performance, appraisal and development Review (PADR) are in accordance with the Agenda for Change terms and conditions of service.

PAs appointed in NHS Wales currently commence work on an agenda for change Band 7 job description which has been agreed and evaluated on an all-Wales basis. This will be subject to review in 2024.

Cost of proposal

2025/26 – Band 7 FTE £88,796

2026/27 – Band 7 FTE £88,796 or £44,398 if discontinued after 18 months

NEXT STEPS:

The executive team are asked to approve the proposal to establish two PA roles in mental health services in Powys. Subject to approval we will submit a proposal to HEIW setting out our plans. We will also develop a job description aligned with the all Wales job description that has already been developed. Plans to develop an induction and education programme will be developed October-December with an anticipated start date for the new PAs in December 2024.

The following Impact Assessment must be completed for all reports requesting Approval, Ratification or Decision, in-line with the Health Board’s Equality Impact Assessment Policy (HR075):

| IMPACT ASSESSMENT | | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------|--|---------------------|-----------------|--|
| Equality Act 2010, Protected Characteristics: | | | | | |
| | No impact | Adverse | Differential | Positive | |
| | | | | | Recruitment of PAs is anonymous until the interview stage and at the interview stage all interviewers will need to be appropriately up to date with relevant E,D & I training. |
| Age | ✓ | | | | |
| Disability | ✓ | | | | |
| Gender reassignment | ✓ | | | | |
| Pregnancy and maternity | ✓ | | | | |
| Race | ✓ | | | | |
| Religion/ Belief | ✓ | | | | |
| Sex | ✓ | | | | |
| Sexual Orientation | ✓ | | | | |
| Marriage and civil partnership | ✓ | | | | |
| Welsh Language | ✓ | | | | |
| Risk Assessment: | | | | | |
| | Level of risk identified | Clinical – There is a low residual clinical risk related to any newly qualified healthcare | | | |

| | None | Low | Moderate | High | |
|---------------------|------|-----|----------|------|--|
| | | | | | professional working within a clinical service. However this is mitigated by several factors including clear lines of supervision, limited scope of practice and ensuring multidisciplinary assessments |
| Clinical | | ✓ | | | <p>Financial – The only risk associated with this proposal is identifying appropriate resource to fund this proposal from the 2025 financial year, however funding related to the single point of assessment programme could be utilised to support this proposal.</p> <p>Operational – a work programme will need to be undertaken to ensure the newly recruited PAs are appropriately supported and supervised. An appropriate scope of practice will be defined to ensure the PAs are working within their level of competence.</p> |
| Financial | | | ✓ | | |
| Corporate | ✓ | | | | |
| Operational | | ✓ | | | |
| Reputational | ✓ | | | | |