

Welsh Culture, Language & Identity

Introduction



Understanding the notions of culture, language, and identity is critical in providing effective, respectful, and inclusive care in today's health and social care settings. Culture refers to the shared beliefs, values, customs, and practices that influence how people live, interact, and perceive the world. It includes everything from religion and traditions to social standards and lifestyle preferences. Language is a powerful communication tool that not only conveys information but also shapes ideas, relationships, and understanding within a certain cultural environment. Language difficulties in healthcare can have a substantial impact on patient treatment quality if not addressed effectively. Identity refers to an individual's sense of self, which is influenced by a variety of elements including ethnicity, gender, age, and life events. Recognising individuals' different identities is critical in health and social care to ensure personalised, sympathetic, and appropriate care. In an increasingly varied culture, professionals must carefully manage these issues in order to deliver culturally competent treatment that respects and values each individual's unique background and perspective.

Welsh In the Healthcare Setting

The integration of Welsh culture and language into health and social care.

Wales, is a multilingual nation, with the Welsh language playing an important role in its national identity and legislative framework. (Roberts and Burton, 2013). The Welsh Government (2022) More than just words action plan, has implemented for the delivery of Welsh speaking in public-sector services, particularly in health and social care, where meeting service users' linguistic needs is critical to providing quality care, the 'Active Offer' is an essential component of the 'More than just words' framework. It emphasises the importance of Welsh language service provision, not just as a right or an option, but as an absolute necessity for many Welsh speakers; The Active Offer, Welsh Government (2015), refers to delivering a Welsh-language service without the need for a request and creates a culture in which services provide a proactive language offer so that people can access care, as equal partners, through the medium of Welsh.

The Welsh Government(2017) aims to increase the number of Welsh speakers to one million by 2050, their goal is to ensure the language's survival for future generations, this is worked together with The Welsh Language Commissioner (n.d.)who is said to be determined and striving to work towards realising their vision of a 'Wales where people can live their life in Welsh'. Also the Public Health Wales' Annual Report for 2023-24 focusses on significant achievements against the Welsh Language Standards. The Welsh language team collaborates closely with Welsh language officers and managers of health boards and trusts across Wales, as well as the Welsh government's department for health and social services, to facilitate joint working and share experiences with the goal of improving Welsh language provision. (Public Health Wales, 2024).



Welsh Context of Health & Social Care

The Welsh context of health and social care is characterized by a strong emphasis on integration, well-being, and a more community-centred approach to both health and social services. (Welsh Government,2018). The Welsh Joint Education Committee (2021), wrote that policies and initiatives developed by the Welsh Government aim to create a more sustainable, equitable, and person-centred system that meets the diverse needs of the population. Since the devolution of powers from the UK government, Wales has created its own approach to health and social care, with a strong emphasis on collaboration, prevention, and wellbeing. (Senedd Cymru, 2020)

Torrance, D (2024), conveys that Health and social care are devolved affairs, meaning they are governed by the Welsh Government rather than the UK Parliament, and Wales frequently adopts a more holistic, integrated approach compared to England, emphasis on prevention, co-production, and sustainability.

Wales has several unique laws that shape health and social care, which THE HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE SYSTEM IN WALES. (2018) wrote; Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, is a cornerstone of Welsh social care policy, focussing on well-being, person-centred care, and early intervention. This act promotes integration of health and social services, giving people more control over the treatment and support they receive, then the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, This legislation requires public authorities to examine long-term consequences, avert issues, and involve citizens in decision-making, and it has an impact on many sectors of policy, including health and social care.



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Welsh Health

Health Care Research Wales, (2024), reflected upon when the NHS was founded in 1948 and more than 700,000 men worked long, dirty, and dangerous shifts in Britain's coal mines, Over 22,000 people suffered from pneumoconiosis, also known as 'black lung', with 85% of them living and working in South Wales, Archie Cochrane, a doctor at Llandough Hospital in Penarth, confronted disease head on with a large-scale investigation of entire mining towns in the Rhondda Fach and Aberdare Valleys. He spent over a decade at the Pneumoconiosis Research Unit investigating the underlying causes of progressive massive fibrosis, where his main interests were the X-ray classification of coal workers' pneumoconiosis and the relationship he demonstrated between X-ray categories, dust exposure, and disability (Chalmers, I, 2006). Lawton and Miles (2019) wrote in the nursing times that, deep mining, although no longer practiced in the UK, still has a population afflicted by the impacts of mining's occupational risks and that miners were exposed to many potentially harmful agents and chemicals, which put them and their relatives at increased risk of developing certain skin and lung conditions, they went onto say that there are still negative effects of mining on physical health that need to be addressed; in the past, miners and their families may not have been adequately informed about the health risks involved and the safety precautions required; the average life expectancy of the population living in coalfields areas is around one year shorter than the national average.

Conclusion

The incorporation of Welsh language, culture, and identity into healthcare is critical to providing truly inclusive and person-centred services throughout Wales. Language is inextricably linked to identity, and for many Welsh speakers, particularly in elderly or rural communities, it is crucial to how care is perceived and experienced. This is especially significant when looking at the health requirements of communities shaped by Wales' industrial heritage, such as former mining areas. These communities frequently confront long-term health concerns, such as respiratory diseases and mental health issues, which stem from previous socioeconomic disadvantage. Recognising these patients' cultural backgrounds, particularly strong community ties and regional identity, is critical to providing empathic and effective care.

The Welsh Government has taken steps to include cultural sensitivity and bilingualism into healthcare policy, reflecting the country's unique identity and values. Wales aggressively promotes the right to receive care in one's own language through projects such as More Than Just Words, while also addressing the unique needs of historically marginalised or underserved communities. Moving forward, maintaining a commitment to cultural competency and localised healthcare solutions will be critical in lowering health disparities and ensuring that all Welsh individuals feel valued, understood, and cared for within the healthcare system.