

WELSH LANGUAGE CULTURE AND IDENTITY IN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE IN WALES



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Introduction

Wales has a distinct health and social care system shaped by devolution, cultural identity, and strong legal protection of the Welsh language. Unlike other UK nations, Welsh is an official language, and its use in health and social care is central to delivering safe, effective and person-centred services. This poster explores the Welsh context of health and social care, the importance of language and culture in care delivery, and how policy and legislation support Welsh-language provision (Welsh Government, 2012; Welsh Government, 2022; NHS Wales, 2021). Failure to provide Welsh-language care can result in unsafe practice, highlighting the professional responsibility of healthcare workers in Wales.

Culture, Identity and Person-Centred Practice

- **Welsh language is central to cultural identity**
- **Influences health beliefs and care expectations**
- **Supports emotional wellbeing**
- **Improves trust between patient and healthcare staff**
- **Essential for person-centred care**

Person-centred care requires professionals to recognise and respect what matters to individuals, including their cultural and linguistic background.

Culturally competent practice in Wales involves (Papadopoulos et al., 2006; Kaihlanen et al., 2019):

- **Respecting Welsh language choice**
- **Recognising the link between language, identity and wellbeing**
- **Building trust through culturally sensitive communication**

When services acknowledge Welsh identity, service users are more likely to feel valued, understood and included

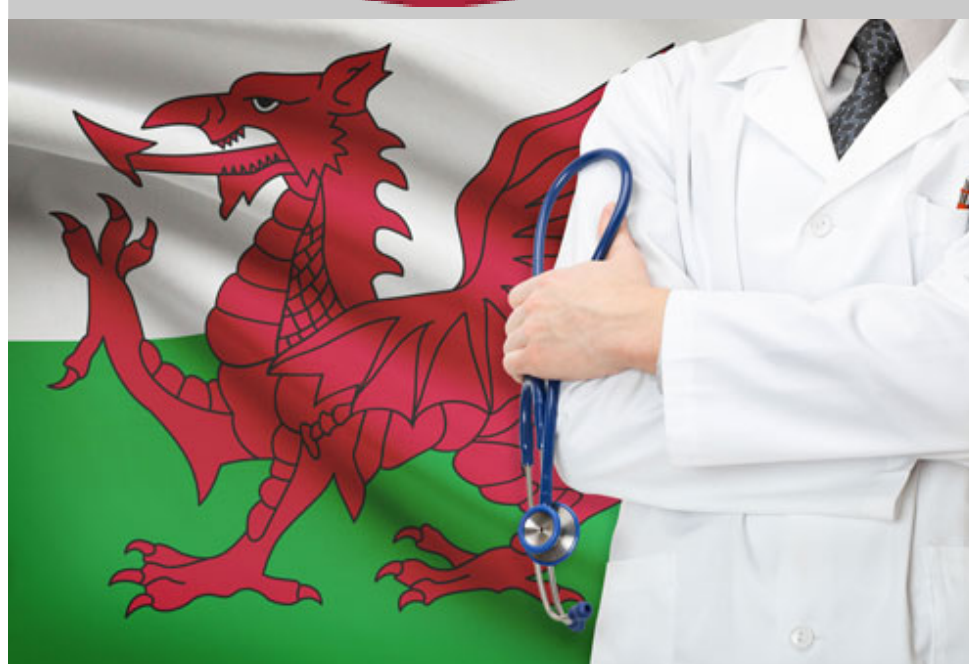


Conclusion

Welsh language, culture and identity play a vital role in health and social care in Wales. Language-aware and culturally competent care improves communication, safety, dignity and patient experience. Welsh law and policy clearly establish the Welsh language as a core component of equitable, person-centred services. By embedding Welsh language and cultural awareness into everyday practice, health and social care services can better meet the needs of the Welsh population and reduce health inequalities (Marmot et al., 2020; WHO, 2018). Therefore, supporting the Welsh language in healthcare is essential to ensure safe, equitable and high-quality care.



The Welsh Context of Health and Social Care

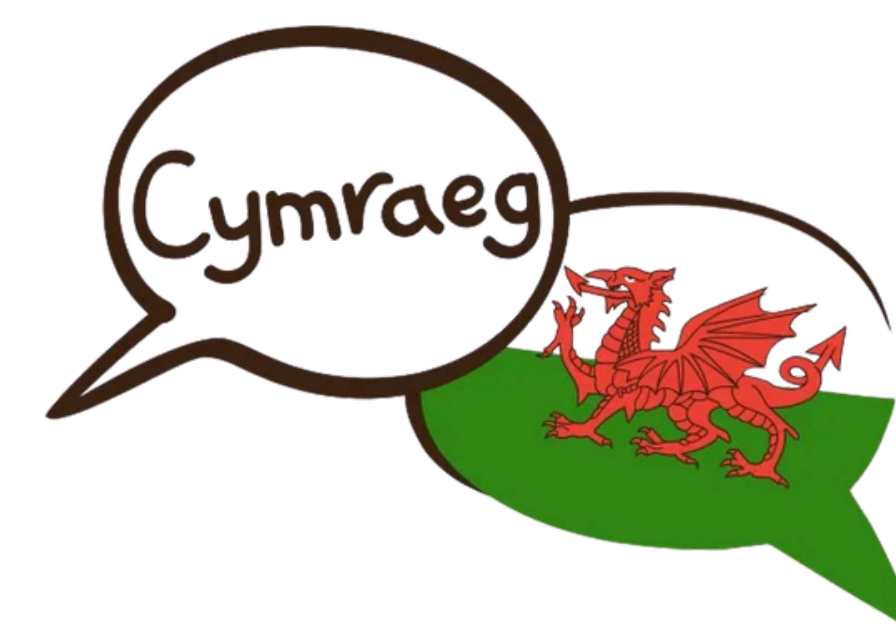


- **Wales has an ageing population**
- **Higher levels of chronic illness and disability**
- **Many Welsh-speaking communities**
- **Rural areas create barriers to healthcare access**
- **Welsh language influences healthcare experience**

Failure to meet Welsh language needs may increase health inequalities and reduce quality of care.

- **Language and cultural identity strongly influence how individuals experience health, illness and care (Baker, 2011; Marmot et al., 2020).**

For many service users, especially older adults, Welsh is their first language and the language in which they feel most confident and emotionally secure (Welsh Government, 2022; Age Cymru, 2021). If healthcare services do not meet Welsh language needs, this can create health inequalities and reduce access to safe and effective care, particularly for older Welsh-speaking patients.



Practical Implications for Health and Social Care Practice

To support Welsh language and culture in practice, services should:

- **Offer Welsh-language services proactively**
- **Recruit and support Welsh-speaking staff**
- **Provide bilingual signage, documentation and digital resources**
- **Encourage staff to use basic Welsh phrases where appropriate**

Example: In dementia care, Welsh-speaking individuals may lose second-language ability and communicate only in Welsh. Care delivered in Welsh improves understanding, reduces distress and supports dignity, particularly for people living with cognitive impairment (Alzheimer's Society, 2018; Roberts et al., 2020) **Healthcare professionals have a duty to ensure safe communication and equal access to care.**

- **Provide Welsh-language services**
- **Use Welsh interpreters where needed**
- **Recruit Welsh-speaking staff**
- **Provide bilingual information**
- **Use basic Welsh phrases**
- **Follow Welsh language policy**



Importance of the Welsh Language in Quality of Care

Effective communication is essential for patient safety, accurate assessment, informed consent and dignity (WHO, 2018; NHS England, 2019; Street et al., 2009; O'Neill, 2017).

Research shows that:

- **People under stress, living with dementia, or experiencing mental health difficulties may revert to their first language.**

- **Improves patient safety**
- **Supports accurate patient assessment and diagnosis**
- **Reduces risk of miscommunication**
- **Protects patient dignity and respect**
- **Improves patient experience and satisfaction**
- **Supports person-centred care**
- **Reduces anxiety and distress**
- **Essential for dementia patients**

Failure to provide care in a patient's preferred language can compromise patient safety

- **Inability to communicate in a preferred language can lead to anxiety, misunderstanding and reduced quality of care.**

Providing care in Welsh is therefore not only a cultural consideration, but a key factor in ensuring safe, high-quality and person-centred care (Roberts et al., 2020; Welsh Government, 2022).

Failure to provide care in a patient's preferred language can compromise patient safety, lead to miscommunication and increase the risk of incorrect assessment and treatment. This highlights that Welsh language provision is not only a cultural preference but a professional and ethical responsibility for healthcare staff.



Policy and Legal Framework

Strong legal and policy commitments support health and social care services in Wales:

- **Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011: Establishes Welsh as an official language and introduces legal language standards for public services.**

- **More Than Just Words (Welsh Government): Requires proactive Welsh-language service provision without individuals needing to ask.**
- **NHS Wales Standards: Embed Welsh-language planning, workforce development and bilingual resources.**

These frameworks ensure Welsh speakers are not treated less favourably and that language needs are considered at every stage of care delivery (Welsh Language Commissioner, 2019; Welsh Government, 2022).