

FOCUS ON: GP Clusters in Wales.

We have now entered the 2nd year of the 3-year cluster development programme. GPC Wales continues to hear very mixed reports across Wales of cluster experiences where some clusters are flourishing yet others are struggling to understand the concept and vision.

These differing views were also confirmed in our recent cluster survey

Why clusters?

- Clusters working together can support individual practices thus enabling them to be more sustainable for the future. General Practice is in a very challenging place right now with ever increasing demand and pressures which have combined to remove the “joy” of General Practice and putting off doctors from entering or remain in General Practice. Working collaboratively together can, if developed properly, support individual practices.
- “Working at scale” is inevitable – this does not necessarily mean formally merging or federating but is something practices need to be aware of.
- All Welsh Government policies are predicated on small groupings of practices working together with partners across health and social care but none have delivered.

What is the potential for clusters?

- To enable individual practices to be sustainable yet work more collaboratively across natural geographical areas
(See our collaborative working document attached)
- To re-ignite the networking across practices and between practices and other community and secondary care partners
- To enable development of effective services to patients – one key role GPs can play is knowing what works well for their patient population.
This will inevitably require a shift of resource which has not happened to date.
To lead the change to more population based working which is what Welsh policies are based on
- To work on relieving the pressures practices feel
- To enable them to become entities that have a clear and united voice at HB level (thus able to be heard clearly)
- To enable them to manage delegated budgets and community staff (but not have the employing responsibilities)

What have clusters achieved across Wales?

The cluster survey highlighted the following:

- Peer support
- Brought together practices to develop the cluster plan of what they would like to achieve
- Some dedicated email advice lines, including participation in shared care for methadone maintenance, pain control pharmacist working in practices, sharing of best practice for end of life care (ABMU)
- Information screens for all practices for public health and 3rd sector information, engagement in physical exercise pilot, support from prescribing advisors for polypharmacy work, collaborative work with 3rd sector in promoting health and wellbeing projects including screening, engagement in brief intervention training, IRIS project for domestic violence, links with child health secondary care services through education sessions, slow loading of warfarin belatedly added (C+V)
- Nothing, developed directory of voluntary organisations to help social services get better out of hours social care packages (BCBU)
- Very little ABMU and difficult to know if feedback to HBs ever reached boards – cluster report was diluted by managerial input
- Access project, developed network based skin lesion clinic for BCCs, want to employ a pharmacist across network to address polypharmacy / medicine management issues
- Developed a stop smoking shop, improved flu vaccination and smoking cessation services uptake (ABHB)
- “No idea as no feedback”
- Developed inter practice referrals
- One stop social services point of contact
- Uniform dementia screening, availability of diabetic specialist nurse funded by pharmaceutical industry (C+V)
- Dementia network, local dermatology network, enhanced phlebotomy, obesity advisory training and service (H Dda)
- Learning from clinical priority areas
- Good position to identify what areas need to be targeted

What support and resources are available for cluster working?

- Attached is a variety of information to practices including:
 1. A guide to collaborative working which gives ideas for clusters to consider – these range from sharing educational sessions / buying groups through to sharing staff etc.

- 2. An electronic link to our GPC Wales strategy document “General Practice: a prescription for a healthy future” which has 8 chapters on main issues affecting Welsh General Practice
- The GPC UK document “Quality first: managing workload to deliver safe patient care” is an excellent document to help practices day to day and there are many themes there to discuss at cluster network level.
- This can be accessed at:
<http://bma.org.uk/practical-support-at-work/gp-practices/quality-first>
- The BMA hosts an online forum - the BMA Community for GP Networks -that Welsh clusters can join and share ideas, concerns and ask for practice advice from other GP networks and federations across the UK. Interested parties can register by following this link:
<http://bma-mail.org.uk/t/JVX-3AEBU-JCJOU4-1JFKOK-1/c.aspx>.
 This will direct you to a short survey. Upon completion of the survey, you’ll then be provided with details for signing up for the BMA Community page

Other work GPC Wales is doing to facilitate effective cluster working

- We are working with PHW to ensure that the practice and cluster reports remain useful to clusters when planning and reviewing services / quality practice etc.
- GPC Wales will be working with Welsh Government and Health Boards across Wales to ensure issues identified from the survey relating to support for clusters are addressed. These include:
 - o Support from Health Boards to Clusters
 - o feedback between meetings,
 - o resources being made available in a timely manner to practices (including what additional resources they can bid for)
 - o project management support – GP practices are not expected to write up business cases themselves
 - o remuneration for lead roles
 - o ensuring accountability and governance frameworks are put in place quickly
 - o looking at other options to address issues with locum backfill to enable engagement with this working
- GPC Wales will be working with Welsh Government and Health Boards to enable mechanisms for the cluster “voice” to be heard.
- GPC Wales will be working with Welsh Government on the “One Wales” programme that will be put in place to enable leadership and developmental training and support for cluster leads.
- Develop links between LMCs and cluster networks across Wales

- We plan on having a specific cluster network resource library on our GPC Wales page

We will keep clusters updated on progress and are always pleased to receive feedback / comments at info.gpcwales@bma.org.uk