

Eluned Morgan MS
Minister for Health and Social Services
Welsh Government
Tŷ Hywel
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

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Dear Eluned,

I write further to our previous discussions, and most recently our correspondence of late last year, regarding electronic prescribing in the NHS. I was very pleased to learn a few days ago that Wales is finally to adopt the tried, tested and refined technical solution in England, whose initial roll-out first began over 17 years ago, in March 2005.

It would be appreciated if you could indicate that this is indeed the plan. If so, will it also involve full implementation of the NHS Spine and all its significant associated benefits of data synchronisation and interoperability between primary and secondary care in Wales but also with health and social care services in England?

You will recall that there were a number of issues experienced in Wales early in the pandemic in relation to identifying patients for shielding, and their correct postal addresses. I believe that adopting the NHS Spine will overcome such problems in the future, as it will allow all levels of the NHS to access up-to-date contact data, including that held for Welsh patients by NHS bodies within England. It will also improve safety by allowing the sharing of Summary Care Records between England and Wales.

In terms of the roll-out of this IT infrastructure, I would be grateful if you could comment on the likely phasing and timing. While I understand that such projects are never simple, experience from elsewhere in the UK, plus the use of very often identical software (eg EMIS in primary care) ought to allow elements of it to be in place relatively quickly. Furthermore, I would argue strongly that those areas where the NHS is struggling more so – for example North Wales – ought to be prioritised.

As I have commented in the past, the fact that Wales continues to use paper prescriptions either picked up in person or sent via fax has caused many people considerable concern for some time. In my view, it is one of many inefficiencies which is contributing to the current meltdown of the NHS in North Wales.

Finally, I would be pleased to assist, in my capacity as Parliamentary Private Secretary to DHSC Ministers, in ensuring you receive prompt cooperation from NHS Digital in your endeavours. While I accept that devolution allows matters to be pursued differently in Wales, I believe this is counterproductive where many elements of a large and complex NHS are concerned, and in areas such as IT infrastructure, there should in general be full and seamless work alongside DHSC. I hope that now is an opportunity to move towards that becoming the case for the future.

Kind regards.

Yours sincerely,

Dr James Davies MP