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Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol
Aneurin Bevan
University Health Board

Freedom of Information Request

FOI 22-430

29th September 2022

I'm a councillor with Caerphilly Council. I've been contacted by a resident in my Ward concerning a delay in receiving post mortem results for a stillbirth in May 2022. The family say they have been told the wait is 6-7 months. I believe the Wales standard is that the post mortem report should be shared with the family within 12 weeks of the post mortem being completed.

They have raises some specific questions with me, which I would be grateful for your comments on:

- **Why is the wait so long (maybe we could understand more if we were informed)**
- **Are there any action plans in place to reduce this wait time?**
- **Why is the wait much less in England? My research has shown it is on average 8 weeks in comparison to the 6-7 months in Wales.**

The family have said that they do appreciate staff are under a huge amount of pressure currently and they are not the only family in this situation; however, the wait time is concerning when they are grieving and need answers.

I would be grateful if you would refer my enquiry to the relevant person responsible for delivering the service who can provide the service level information requested.

Unfortunately, the Health Board is unable to influence the length of time that families currently have to wait for post-mortem results as they are not undertaken by the Health Board. This service is undertaken by Cardiff and Vale University Hospital (CAVUHB) who have advised that they regret very much that there have been delays in the pathology pathway and appreciate that this exacerbates what is an already incredibly distressing time for families. CAVUHB have provided assurance that post-mortems are performed in a timely manner and the deceased children are returned to families as soon as possible so that funeral arrangements can take place.

CAVUHB have advised however that there are delays to the completion of the post mortem reports as a result of a capacity gap within the paediatric pathologist workforce. Every effort has been made to address the gaps in service, whether it be through recruitment, temporary cover arrangements, outsourcing, regional collaboration, changes in internal processes or other means. Unfortunately, recruiting to these kinds of roles is not easy or quick and this is reflective of pathology services across the country.

Paediatric pathology is a very specialised division of cellular pathology service provision. There is recognised national and indeed international shortage of pathologists trained and practicing in paediatric pathology, consequently there is significant international competition for qualified paediatric pathologists. A comprehensive and attractive benefits package has been produced. CAVUHB are actively discussing with potential candidates across the country with a view to attracting them to work in Cardiff and the service is working closely with other centres providing paediatric pathology services including Bristol, Birmingham and Liverpool. All of these centres are subject to the same staffing challenges, pooling resources regionally and nationally, is enabling all centres to provide services to patients, albeit within the recognised constraints.

Locum services have been considered, the shortage of pathologists trained and practicing in paediatric pathology is reflected in the Locum market, with no locums being available in the short, medium or long term. CAVUHB have been successful in outsourcing some cases to Liverpool, this does however not completely alleviate the national paediatric capacity deficit.

A plan has been developed to improve the sustainability of the service in the mid to long term and are looking at developing paediatric pathologist training locally. The business case to increase the number of paediatric pathologists within CAVUHB is under consideration for funding from the [Welsh Health Specialist Services Commissioning Committee](#) (WHSCC) currently.

Whilst this does not help the current situation and the distress your residents are experiencing whilst waiting for the report, I wanted to provide some reassurance that CAVUHB are doing everything they can to address the problem.