

# A National Occupational Health Service for Primary Care in Wales.

## Project Background:

The COVID-19 pandemic has been one of the most challenging healthcare crises since the inception of NHS. Though the pandemic affected most people, it disproportionately impacted ethnic minority groups, people with lower incomes and our frontline health and care workers across the UK. Many of these groups are still struggling with the effects Covid-19.

Primary Care teams in Wales were struggling with their mental/physical wellbeing even before the Covid-19 Pandemic as a result of workload and exhaustion. This could also in part be due to the lack of a dedicated and independent National Occupational Health Service to oversee health, wellbeing and safety at work.

## Project Aims/Objectives:

- To understand the availability and uptake of Occupational Health service for Primary Care Team across Wales.
- To understand the need for a dedicated and independent National Primary Care Occupational Health service and what this might potentially look like.
- To design and test the viability of a potential new model of an Occupational Health Service for Primary Care in Wales.

## Project Approach:

Alongside drawing insight from observations of activities in Primary Care during the Covid-19 pandemic, several steps were taken to achieve the project aims, which are set out below:

- Baseline Data Collection:** Data was obtained from five Welsh Health Boards related to how many Primary Care staff accessed Occupational Health Service set up by Health Boards.
- Primary Care Workforce Health and Safety Survey for Wales.** This survey was distributed to the All-Wales Primary Care Workforce team (both clinical and non-clinical teams) to gain further understanding from frontline clinicians.
- Discussions and interviews with occupational health experts:** in Wales, England and Scotland on the current Occupational Health service provisions, their experiences as service providers and their vision for the future.
- Data analysis, design and testing of new Occupational Health service model for Primary Care in Wales:** Drawing insight from data collection, a new model of a potential National Occupational Health Service for Primary Care in Wales was developed and tested.
- Evaluation of new model:** Focus groups and questionnaires were then used stakeholder views on the proposed model.

## Project Outcome(s):

Findings from data collection (Fig. 1 & 2) demonstrated both low awareness and uptake of Occupational Health Services by Primary Care staff in Wales using data collected from health boards and surveys

Number of Primary Care staff who had accessed Occupational Health Services in five NHS Wales Health Boards				
	Pre-Pandemic	Number:	During and Post Pandemic	Number:
SBUHB	01/03/2018 29/02/2020	1	01/03/2020 23/07/2021	5
ABUHB	01/03/2018 29/03/2021	29	01/03/2020 31/12/2021	33
HDUHB	No data was provided	-----	From 2021 - 2022	147
CAVUHB	-----	-----	From 2020 - June 2022	25
CTMUHB	-----	-----	From 2020 - June 2022	1

Figure 1: Uptake of Occ. Health services by Primary Care staff across five NHS Wales Health Boards.

Findings from the survey also demonstrated a significant need for more effective occupational health services to support Primary Care staff in Wales (see Fig. 3 & 4).

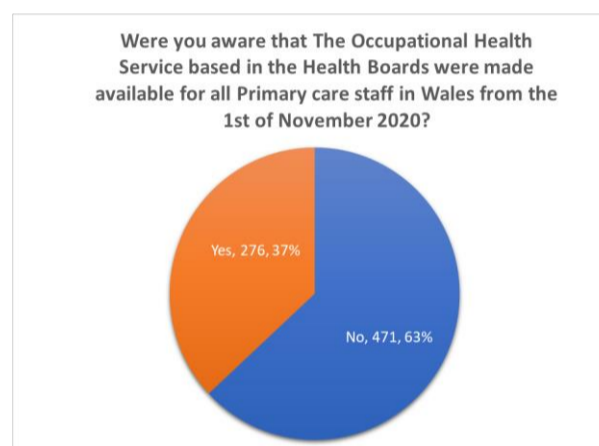


Figure 2: 63% of staff working in Primary Care did not know that Health Board made available Occupational Health Service from 1<sup>st</sup> of November 2020.

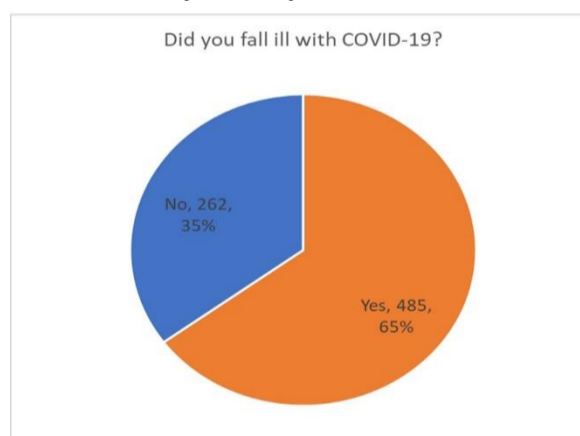


Figure 3: The Survey showed that 65% of staff had fallen ill with COVID-19 infection.

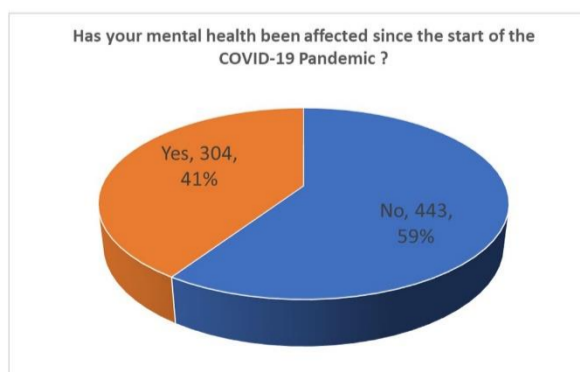


Figure 4: 41% of staff (304) are struggling with their mental well-being since the start of Covid-19 Pandemic.

Drawing insight from survey and interview data as well as the project lead's personal experience of delivering frontline care as a GP, a new model for a National Primary Care Occupational Health Service in Wales was designed and tested (Fig. 4 below and contact project lead for further detail). Suggested roles of the potential new service integrated into the model include amongst others: Health assessments, surveillance and mental health support. The service would be run independently and would be self funding.

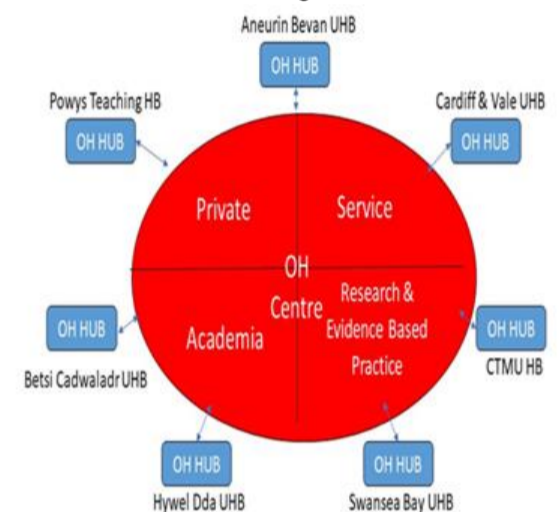


Figure 4: Potential new model for a National Primary Care Occupational Health Service in Wales.

## Project Impact:

Responses to questionnaires distributed to expert focus group members showed that 91% of people who answered agreed that there is a need for a National Occupational Health Service for Primary Care in Wales. They also felt that the proposed service would have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of the Primary Care staff.

## Key Conclusions:

The project has highlighted that the lack of National Occupational Health Service for Primary Care had potentially impacted staff health and wellbeing including their safety at work. The survey showed 65% of Primary Care staff had fallen ill from Covid-19 infection and 41% are struggling with their mental wellbeing.

The development of this service could significantly improve the health and wellbeing of our Primary Care workforce in Wales. This independent and self-funding service could help with retention and recruitment of the workforce by ensuring that priority is given to their wellbeing, ensuring that they are fit and able to look after our nation. This service could also help reduce the financial cost of hiring a locum workforce during sickness absence.

## Next Steps:

- Further work and validation of the model working with stakeholders across Wales.