Comisiwn Bevan Commission

'Beyond the Curve' Series

Listening to People: Preparing Wales for future Covid-19 outbreaks

July 2020

Executive Summary

"'Covid-19 has disrupted the social, political, economic, emotional and existential wellbeing of the world. Morbidity and mortality being the immediate concern.'"

The Bevan Commission has been, and will continue to draw strategic lessons based upon evidence from across the globe. Whilst there is currently insufficient information to come to definitive conclusions, we need to draw from what we do know in order to prepare in the coming months to respond to future outbreaks.

This paper has been informed by people working in the system and people using the system, alongside the collective expertise and acumen of the Bevan Commissioners. Insight and experiences were gained from our growing alumni of Bevan Exemplars, Fellows and Advocates over a 3-month period between April and June 2020. A full report detailing the findings from this will be published in due course.

To protect and prepare Wales for future Covid-19 outbreaks, our findings have identified the following 8 core themes which need attention, further details of which can be found within the text.

1. **Public Engagement and Trust**

2. **Testing, Tracing, Tracking and Lockdowns**

3. **Protect the Vulnerable in Communities**

4. **Caring for Care in Homes**

5. **Protect and Support People in Work**

6. **Thinking ahead – Prevent, protect and prepare together**

7. **Ensuring and Upholding Human Dignity**

8. **Maintaining the Changes and Learning for the Future**

The Bevan Commission will continue to develop its thinking in its upcoming publication *'In Place of Fear – Forging a better Future'*. This will help identify longer-term priorities and actions needed for inclusion into a recovery plan for Wales.

1. Public Engagement and Trust

"It's amazing what people can do if you give them the trust, authority and resources to get the job done."

The initial UK-wide response carried a clear message, effectively communicated, which the public overwhelmingly supported and complied with. Over time, the message has diverged across the four UK administrations, and may well diverge further as management is devolved to, or focuses upon, localities. This divergence has undermined trust. People, communities and the voluntary sector play a key role in supporting formal services and will be essential to delivering the capacity needed for a second wave. It is therefore essential that Welsh Government continues to plan, support and capitalise on the good will it has garnered from the public by:

- Investing in clear, honest and open messaging and communication with the public, acknowledging what we do not fully know; to maintain public trust, effective management, safety, vigilance and compliance.
- Actively promoting the core messages through a 'Covid Code' campaign
- Securing greater local engagement and decision making to prevent and protect people. This will be increasingly important for any 'localised' lock down, with local leaders, people and communities all taking responsibility (through personal and collective actions) to reduce the risk of infection.
- Using existing local and regional knowledge, networks and connections (voluntary sector, neighbourhood schemes, primary care clusters and community services) to help plan and provide support -especially testing, tracking and tracing.
- Reviewing how best to ensure how best to engage and optimise the support of volunteers both within the community and in health and care systems. The first call for volunteers had a significant response, but not always the infrastructure or systems to utilise them most effectively.

2. Testing, Tracking, Tracing and Lockdowns

"Perhaps the most important action is to put in place an effective system for testing, tracing contacts, and isolating those infected."

Key to managing further outbreaks will be an effective system of prompt testing, rapid tracing and appropriate isolation, tailored to local circumstances. This will require the cooperation of the public, volunteers, the voluntary sector and potentially the military. Welsh Government must accelerate the effective and rapid implementation of the scheme by ensuring:

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- Rapid (24hr) data collation, sharing (suspected and confirmed cases) and analysis, graded by severity and outcomes, to inform local actions and 'Test, Track and Trace'.
- An efficient testing infrastructure, with local expertise (utilising local Directors of Public Health) to use data to inform decisions and focus actions on local areas of infection
- Well planned and run, locally delivered, tracing services that are forensic and pro-active with public support and engagement.

- Development and implementation of fast (one hour) diagnostic tests in emergency departments

3. Protect the Vulnerable in Communities

"Covid-19 has crowded out the many other patients with life-threatening or limiting conditions. We are telling people to 'protect the NHS' but what about the people? There has been a failure to plan a parallel running of normal service"

The initial medical response to Covid-19 concentrated on saving the lives of those with the virus. For many, this was at the expense of other core basic medical needs and support. Planning for any further outbreaks must:

- Actively engage primary care clusters and care homes in planning to identify and support the most vulnerable, as noted by Professor Hawthorne.
- Contact those at greatest risk from Covid-19 in advance (post-transplant, those on immunosuppressive treatments, frail elderly, BAME, those with chronic conditions) to plan and support their health and social care needs.
- Plan in advance to continue critical, emergency, cancer and other essential care services and maintain the health of those with chronic conditions, including in care homes.
- Plan and promote a campaign to encourage uptake of the flu vaccine, with a focus on the relevance to Covid-19.
- Identify and target support and interventions at high risk families and children.

4. Caring for Care in Homes

"At last, it is clear that the Care Industry must be brought in from the cold. They have been, seemingly, out of the equation for an entirely unacceptable time. Now, it is clear that a positive step must be taken on their behalf."

The largest concentration of the vulnerable are in care homes. Whilst care homes play an important part in helping to reduce the pressure on hospitals, there is an urgent need to consider how care homes can be safe places for residents (with and without Covid-19) and for staff. Preparations for any future outbreaks must consider the following:
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- Urgently undertake a review of how care homes can rapidly adapt to be safe for residents with or without Covid-19. This should include enhancing clinical support to Care Homes (e.g. provision of oxygen treatment, oximetry and remote consultation with hospitals) alongside arrangements to protect the non-infected from Covid-19.
- Health and care services must work alongside providers to put plans in place to ensure residents and staff are kept safe and well. This includes how primary care and community services can be optimised to support needs.
- Ensure financial and logistical support are provided to support actions such as equal access to PPE and access to a central NHS procurement processes.
- Regular (weekly) Covid-19 testing should be available for residents and staff.
- Plan and prepare in advance safe discharge and transfer arrangements between hospitals, care homes and in the community.

5. Protect and support people in Work

"Whilst restarting services, there also needs to be focus put on healthcare staff and allowing them to have appropriate rest and leave or we will see burnout issues very quickly."

The Bevan Commission noted the vulnerability, stress and fatigue felt by hospital and care staff in particular and we must listen to and act on their experiences. Attention must be given to those staff who are most vulnerable, owing to pre-existing conditions, ethnicity or obesity. To secure a healthy working environment for any future outbreaks we must:

- Undertake workplace risk assessments, establishing safe working practices and securing PPE supplies, especially for front line workers in health and care.
- Undertake personalised risk assessments for BAME NHS, social and community care staff and for all staff currently shielding.
- Identify and support BAME and other at risk groups (such as obesity) in workplaces with a plan to protect and keep them safe.
- Undertake a rapid review of occupational health services to assess and address their ability to manage future outbreaks, including emergency mental health consultancy services for staff including those with PTSD and other needs.
- Communicate and work with staff to ensure they have time and support to rest and recover.

6. Thinking ahead – Prevent, Protect and Prepare together

"Having been involved with Covid in the Health Board, it has truly broken down barriers. With teams working together in a way that seems to have been impossible until now."

Covid-19 demonstrated both the ability and need to work together in times of crisis. This helped ensure that collective action was taken to help those in need. We should not wait for the next crisis to maximise the benefits from partnership working – we should do it as part of everyday working. In the short-term we should:

- Share local intelligence and resources with a joint responsibility to protect people, staff and patients.
- Rapidly assess our capacity and capability for a future outbreak and make contingency plans to reorganise health and care provision as appropriate including the provision of step down / rehabilitation for post Covid patients.
- Collectively secure future supplies of PPE of appropriate standard (where possible from local sources and re-usable) for easy access to those in need.
- Establish hospitals and primary care clusters into 'Covid Red' and 'Covid Green' categories and collaborate across regions and clusters to establish localised specialised services and support.

7. Ensuring death with dignity and upholding human dignity

"The way in which, when faced with large numbers, we stop thinking about the human cost of parting with loved ones without being able to say goodbye."

There is a balance to be struck between ensuring access to loved ones and infection control. Wales must plan to avoid the repetition of the isolation that some people

experienced at their end of life when access to relatives was severely restricted, or even in some cases, denied altogether. For many this was at the expense of compassion. In any future outbreak, no sick child should be without their parent or carer and no one should die isolated from those they love.

- Plan and prepare for increased palliative care provision and support.
- There must be flexible interpretation of the 'rules' and individualised risk assessments against agreed criteria or equipment to separate an infected individual from the environment rather than carers relying on PPE.
- Provide training and support to enable sensitive discussions between clinicians and their patients on end of life care as previously set out in the Bevan Commission paper 'Covid-19 Caring for a dying relative at home'.

- Prepare a national guideline to support services in balancing infection risk against emotional needs enabling loved ones to be with the very seriously ill, taking account of the lessons from Spain. .

8. Maintaining the changes and learning for the future

"Out of all of this trauma, Wales needs a vigorous re-appraisal of its health and care provision."

We must not lose the momentum for innovative solutions we have gained though this crisis. We must learn from, capture and support new ideas at all levels, providing an infrastructure to maintain innovative working such as telephone consultations, video conferencing software to enable efficient home working and distance microscopes for pathology, as the 'new normal' in forging a better future.

- Incentivise and support people and organisations to develop, adopt and share innovative practice.
- Build on existing infrastructures and programmes such as Bevan Exemplars, Bevan Advocates, Adopt and Spread and Accelerate.