



National Pathology Programme Newsletter – Jan 2025

In this issue.....

Updates on the key areas of our work	1	Focus On	4
Good News Stories	3	Driving improvement in cellular pathology	4
RCPATH Pathology Symposium and Wales Coastal Walk to raise awareness on Rare Diseases	3	Information	6
CTMUHB Biochemistry Leads the Way in Sustainable Innovation	4	Upcoming Pathology Events	6
		The Programme Team	6
		Contact us	7

Programme Background

The National Pathology Programme is a strategic body in Wales sitting within the NHS Wales Executive, which is in turn hosted by Public Health Wales. Its remit is to work with Health Boards and Trusts across Wales to support the development of high quality, effective and sustainable pathology services. Priority areas for improvement that are the focus of the National Programme were originally identified in the *Pathology Statement of Intent (2019)* and current work is aligned with the *Diagnostics Recovery and Transformation Strategy for Wales (2023 – 2025)*.

Updates on the key areas of our work

Quality Assurance

The Quality Assurance and Regulatory Compliance workstream has been working alongside informatics colleagues from the NHS Wales Executive, to collate turnaround time data for Blood Sciences tests on a national basis. The dashboard has been approved for publication on the National Pathology Programme and Data and Analytics SharePoint sites. It will be updated monthly.

Business Intelligence

Work has continued with the BI function from NHS Wales Executive to develop national demand, capacity and performance dashboards / metrics for Pathology specialties. It is anticipated that this work will result in the availability of the first tranche of these resources to be made available to the NHS Wales Executive and National Services shortly. This first tranche includes comprehensive demand and capacity for Cellular Pathology services and National performance data for an initial group of Blood Sciences urgent tests. It is hoped that this data can be further enhanced and expanded to provide opportunities for service

benchmarking, relevant information to drive improvement pieces of work and intelligence to support both local and National Business Cases.

Digital and Novel Technologies

The business case for Digital Cellular Pathology is continuing to be reviewed by individual Health Boards, with approval received from CVUHB and more recently, HDUHB.

Unfortunately, the all Wales Computational Pathology project did not win the Modernising Diagnostics Award at the Health Service Journal (HSJ) Awards, although being shortlisted was still a massive achievement.

Value Based Healthcare are finalising a report that will explore the potential of a digital microbiology solution in Wales. Work is ongoing to explore the possibility of a digital scanning and AI solution in haematology and we are working with the suppliers to obtain indicative costs. Discussions are continuing with suppliers and stakeholders to support the introduction of automated Microtomy in laboratories in Wales.

Equipment Register Project

The project aim is to implement a process for collating and prioritising pathology equipment requirements. This is to comply with the recommendation from the National Diagnostics Programme (NDP) to adopt the same formal process developed and implemented by the National Imaging Programme. This process will assist the National Pathology Programme (NPP) to respond to any short notice requests for bids from the NDP if capital monies are made available from Welsh Government.

Submissions for baseline equipment data for the Cellular Pathology have been collated with one Health Board's submission still in progress. Further information on any equipment across the rest of the pathology disciplines that are currently on local risk registers and including the approximate cost for equipment replacement, has now been requested. Approaches to the formation of a National Pathology Equipment and Capital Priorities Group (NPECPG), the next step of the project, are now being explored.

Environmental Sustainability

National Mapping of Sustainability: Work is ongoing to map best practices for environmental sustainability in pathology services across Wales. The deadline for the sustainability self-assessment tool has been extended due to service pressures.

Collaborative Meetings: Environmental sustainability meetings are taking place with various NHS Wales teams. A meeting with the Critical Care, Trauma, and Emergency Medicine team is scheduled for January 2025.

Single-Use Plastics Project: NPP is part of a team working on reducing single-use plastics in laboratories. They attended the Welsh Government's Spread & Scale Academy and are developing a 90-day plan to scale up the project.

Environmental Sustainability Seminar: The NPP attended a seminar on optimising sample storage and sustainability. Experts shared best practices for efficient sample storage in biobanks and ULT freezers.

If you are undertaking any sustainability projects in your organisation that the NPP is not aware of or you have a particular interest in environmental sustainability please contact Kim Williams, Senior Project Manager at Kim.Williams5@wales.nhs.uk

Workforce, Training and Education

The Pathology Practice Education Facilitator (PEF) pilot in SE region:

The Recommendations Paper has been discussed at the October Diagnostic Strategic and Operational Group (DSOG) meeting. Information on potential costings has been added to the paper and following further discussions with HEIW, the amended Recommendations Paper will be taken to DSOG in February.

Point of Care training:

The PoCT Training sub-group has undertaken a career development review for PoCT staff in Wales, on behalf of Pathology Workforce and Education Group (PWEG) and the Point of Care Testing Strategy Group. (See *article for further information*)

Limited Scope Reporting BMS training pilot:

The pilot is being funded by the Moondance Cancer Initiative and training is progressing well with 2 trainees in CVUHB. The Programme produced an Interim Report recently for the first 6 months of the pilot, which has indicated good progress and a real impact that the training module and trainees are having on the processing of the bowel screening workload and improving turnaround times.

The Programme has secured funding from the IBMS for a Subject Matter Expert/Project Lead to take forward the work to develop a 'virtual' academy for pathology on the HEIW Y Ty Dysgu platform. We will be recruiting for this fixed term/secondment role shortly – watch this space!

Improving Staff Retention:

Webinars were held in December in association with the HEIW Retention Programme and were available to diagnostics staff working in Pathology, Imaging and Endoscopy services. The webinars are the first step in working with staff to share learning around retention, and introduced the work of the Retention Programme, the Hub and toolkits that have been developed, and future plans. Local HB Retention Leads also attended, and they are available to work with staff to improve retention. For further information and access to the resources, please use this link to the [National Retention Hub](#).

Communications

Unfortunately, the Communications work has had to be temporarily halted due to Programme resources.

Good News Stories

RCPATH Pathology Symposium and Wales Coastal Walk to raise awareness on Rare Diseases

The Wales Pathology Symposium, held on October 25th in Cardiff, brought together leaders and innovators in pathology to address advancements and challenges in the field. Alan Deacon, NHS Wales Executive's National Pathology Lead, outlined the critical reliance of 95% of clinical pathways on pathology and highlighted efforts by the National Pathology Programme to address data gaps, limited resources, and fragile services. Dr. Muhammad Aslam showcased Wales' digital pathology evolution, including an all-Wales digital pathology validation and future AI applications for cancer detection. Sophie Bannister and Fiona Kerr presented innovative prenatal services for fetal anomaly detection and rapid sequencing, supporting informed pregnancy decisions. Bernie Croal from the Royal College of Pathologists shared strategic plans to uphold pathology standards and foster member engagement. Additional presentations by Dr. Tariq El-Shanawany and Dr. Danja Schulenburg-Brand discussed calculated globulin level diagnostics and porphyria

services respectively. The symposium concluded with award-winning poster presentations, including audits on perioperative allergy services, fetal RHD genotyping, and thyroid cytology, underscoring the essential role of pathology in driving service improvements across Wales.

The Wales Coastal Path Walk to raise awareness about RARE DISEASES took place on October 26th. It was organized by RCPATH Wales Regional Council in collaboration with groups such as Nerve Tumour UK, EMWWH, Medics4Rare Diseases, and SWAN Clinic UK. The event began on a beautiful, warm autumn morning at Penarth Pier Pavilion. We walked along the coastal path through Cardiff Harbour, ending at the Senedd. We were joined by Jenny Rathbone MS and Gwenda Roberts, the Mayor of Penarth. Engaging with the public along the way, we shared pathology flyers and enjoyed meaningful conversations with both politicians and other walkers. The event concluded with an invitation to the Senedd for refreshments and further discussions—an inspiring and successful day overall.

CTMUHB Biochemistry Leads the Way in Sustainable Innovation

CTMUHB Biochemistry, led by the Health Board's Facilities Department and Innovation Team, has forged a ground breaking partnership with a local plastic recycler and a third-sector supported employment charity to revolutionise waste management in healthcare. By rethinking the potential of laboratory single-use plastics, this collaboration has successfully diverted materials typically destined for clinical waste, collecting several grades of plastic on-site and transporting them to a local business that reprocesses waste plastic into reusable products.

This initiative aligns with the Health Board's commitments under the *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015* by addressing the long-term impact of waste decisions and fostering environmental sustainability. The partnership with ELITE Supported Employment, a charity empowering disabled and disadvantaged individuals across South, Mid, and West Wales, has also generated significant social benefits. This collaboration has created new employment opportunities and offered meaningful improvements to the well-being of socially disadvantaged individuals.

In recognition of this pioneering work, the Health Board has been shortlisted for several prestigious awards, including the NHS Wales Sustainability Award and the MRW National Recycling Awards. These accolades highlight the innovative and impactful nature of the initiative at CTMUHB within sustainable healthcare practices.

The project has strengthened the Health Board's social responsibility goals and is a powerful example in sustainable innovation. Feedback from laboratory staff has been overwhelmingly positive, demonstrating the enthusiasm for scaling and spreading this work across other health boards in Wales.

CTMUHB Biochemistry together with the facilities department has shown that healthcare waste can become a resource for innovation and social impact. This effort exemplifies Biochemistry and the Health Board's commitment to addressing the climate emergency and doing the right thing for both people and the planet.

Focus On

Driving improvement in cellular pathology

Improvement Cymru and vehicle manufacturer Toyota expand their work to drive down the time between suspicion of cancer and treatment.

Cellular pathology teams in Cardiff and Vale University Health Board (CAVUHB), Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board (CTMUHB) and Hywel Dda University Health Board (H DUHB) will be working to reduce cancer diagnosis time for patients in Wales using lean methodology.

Improvement through the phases

Since October 2022, more than 100 staff across NHS Wales have completed training in Toyota's version of lean methodology, the Toyota Production System (TPS). Participants were made up of seven multi-disciplinary teams (MDTs) across Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB), Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) and Swansea Bay University Health Board (SBUHB). This work was part of the Suspected Cancer Pathways project, which was funded by the National Strategic Clinical Network for Cancer and implemented in partnership with Toyota.

Through a phased approach, staff took principles from TPS to increase the pace and reliability of the early diagnostic stage of the cancer pathway. Diagnostic elements of the pathways are pivotal in often delaying a decision to treat, impacting patient wellbeing and clinical outcomes, so it was prudent to start with this stage.

The first two phases concentrated on the first 28 days of the cancer pathways for Lower Gastro-Intestinal (GI), Urology, Gynaecological and Lung cancers, which covers point of suspicion to decision to treat. Areas including referral management and diagnostic access were reviewed.

Phase three saw the project expand its focus in cellular pathology, an area with processes that most resemble those of a manufacturing plant. Visual management, standardisation and 5S were areas of focus that had commonality across the three cellular pathology labs.

Staff were supported by colleagues from Improvement Cymru on developing and testing their change ideas through a peer learning approach.

Helping us hit the ultimate target of reducing waiting time

Dominique Bird, Interim National Director for Quality Safety and Improvement, said: "There were many improvements observed within different health boards as a result of the work. One health board looking at Lower GI cancer reduced the time it takes for a person to be informed if they have cancer from their first outpatient appointment by 15 days. Another health board halved the time it takes for patients with an urgent suspected cancer (USC) referral to be booked in for an MRI scan.

"We also had one health board apply 5S methodology to a Urology one-stop clinic so staff now spend just over 17 minutes per week on stock control compared to the previous two plus hours, shortening clinical procedure time.

"The work that took place across selected cellular pathology labs resulted in patients' samples being processed more quickly. One lab reported the potential to process over 500 samples a day as tissue transfer processing time had more than halved and errors in dissection had also halved.

"It's encouraging to see so many improvements implemented in labs and health boards across Wales thanks to the work we have supported with Toyota. This work is helping us hit the ultimate target of reducing waiting time for patients with suspected cancer. We look forward to working with even more teams across Wales to spread and scale these developments and discover even more improvements that can be made within the system", added Dominique.

The first of its kind in Wales

Thanks to teams proving that lean methodology can be beneficial within cellular pathology, this approach - known as phase 4 - is being rolled out to the other three cellular pathology labs in CAVUHB, CTMUHB and HDUHB. Our next step is to form a first of its kind All-Wales Cellular Pathology Collaborative.

Collaboratives have been used for improvement in healthcare for over 20 years worldwide. A collaborative is a learning model that creates a structure for organisations to easily learn from each other and from recognised experts in topic areas where they want to make improvements.

It is hoped that the 12-month collaborative will demonstrate the importance of cellular pathology as part of the diagnostic stage of the Suspected Cancer Pathway. This includes optimising the management of people living with cancer and the 'worried well' who can deteriorate and suffer harm when delays occur in their diagnosis.

We will continue to update on our work on the collaborative, and our work on the cancer pathways, on the Improvement Cymru [website](#).

Information

Details of the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) revised standards compared to the current standards: [HCPC revised Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics](#)

HEIW resource for healthcare in Wales, outlining the skills, competencies and behaviours needed in digitised environments: [The Digital Capability Framework matrix for Enhanced, Advanced and Consultant Level Practice](#)

IBMS Awards 2025: Open for nominations: [IBMS Awards - the most prestigious accolades in biomedical science](#)

Upcoming Pathology Events

The Freezer Challenge

Does your lab have fridges, freezers, or cold rooms? Don't miss this opportunity to make 2025 energy efficient. Sign up today to stay updated on the 2025 competition launch

[JOIN THE 2025 CHALLENGE](#)

16th NHS Workforce Conference – Tuesday 6th May 2025

Wales Health Science Conference 2025 – Thursday 15th and Friday 16th May 2025
Venue Cymru, Llandudno LL30 1BB

MediWales Connects Conference 2025 – Tuesday 17th June 2025 Cardiff

[Registration is via their website and is free to NHS staff](#)

The Programme Updates

Congratulations to Caity Thomas on her well-deserved new role as our Programme Manager.

And a hello to our new recruits.... **[Jack Buchanan & Demi Ford](#)**.

Contact us

Please email NHSWHC.National.Pathology.Programmes@wales.nhs.uk if you would like:

- to be added to the circulation list for our newsletter
 - to provide feedback or contributions
 - opportunities to engage with the work of the Programme
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Next issue – April 2025