

Appendix 5 – Correspondence

For the attention of the members of the Health Scrutiny Committee

The following letters are presented as mere examples of the correspondence which has taken place with Health Board officials over the years and the way in which our grievances, complaints and questions have been entirely disregarded. If required, it could be possible to add dozens of other similar letters in order to underline Betsi's abusive attitude towards the residents of Stiniog and the Welsh Uplands. I hope that you will have an opportunity to cast your eyes over them.

Firstly, however, and for your convenience as members of the Committee, this is the BBC's report in 2012 with a record of how the Scrutiny Committee had stated its concerns early on in the process:-

31.10.2012

BBC News Gwynedd council call to halt Betsi Cadwaladr shake-up

Gwynedd council leaders have urged that controversial plans to change health services in north Wales be put on hold.

The Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) has just ended a 10-week public consultation on changes including community hospital closures which have prompted local protests. The council's cabinet said it was seeking clarification, fearing it could be left with additional costs. But it admitted it had no authority over the health board's decisions.

The cabinet wants new services in place and plans financed before any changes are put into place.

In a draft response to the proposed changes, the cabinet says transferring services from hospitals to the community ***"raises the risk that additional financial implications will fall on the council ... If the health board is shutting down services what is going to be put in their place?"***

(Wyn Williams Gwynedd council cabinet member for Social services and Care)

"In undertaking substantial change there is a need to win the trust of Gwynedd inhabitants and ensuring that what is proposed establishes more sustainable services arrangements for the future," the draft says. ***"It is requested therefore that the changes do not take place until new services are in place or plans approved and financed."***

Following Tuesday's council meeting, cabinet member for social services and care Wyn Williams said: ***"We're very concerned about the [health board's] documentation. The working relationship between care and health is not clear, and if the health board is shutting down services what it is going to be put in their place?"***

No authority

"We have drawn attention to the weaknesses in a [health board] report and we're asking them not to make any changes unless the plans are known to the public. Until we receive clarification we urge the health board not to go ahead with its plans."

But Mr Williams stressed the council had no authority over the health board's final decision.

The Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board has spent 10 weeks seeking views. Under BCUHB proposals being put forward, Blaenau Ffestiniog and Flint community hospitals face closure, while complex neonatal intensive care would be moved to Arrowe Park in Wirral. The Betsi Cadwaladr board consultation closed on Sunday.

**Extracts from the correspondence with Mary Burrows, the first Chief
Executive of the BCUHB**

13.12.2012

Dear **Mrs Burrows**,

Your recent decisions regarding the Blaenau Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital was the subject of great concern and discontent for us as members of the Memorial Hospital Defence Committee, and we are once again given reason to doubt the motives of the Health Board.

Firstly, you have closed the Minor Injuries Unit **'for a 4 week period due to the sickness absence of temporary staff to maintain patient safety and support existing nursing staff'**. Could you therefore be so good as to answer the following questions?

- i. How can you be so certain about the period of four weeks?
- ii. Do you firmly promise that the service will be restored as soon as the sickness period comes to an end, whenever this might be?
- iii. We know that the nurse, who is by now a patient, was sent recently - contrary to her wishes, possibly - to help maintain the minor injuries service at Ysbyty Alltwn when there was a crisis there, and that our other Grade 6 nurses at the Memorial Hospital have been used for the same purpose in recent months.

Therefore, given that the Memorial Hospital is now enduring the same crisis as the one at Alltwn, why can't the same support be offered to us here, **'to maintain patient safety'**. That is, why can't the shortage be filled similarly for us by sending a competent nurse from another hospital?

Or allow me to ask the same question in a different way - When Alltwn had a staffing problem, why weren't the hours of the minor injuries unit cut there? And why were the residents of Porthmadog and surrounding area not given the same choice to **'contact either their local GP or go to the nearest Minor Injuries Unit at Ysbyty... (Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital, maybe?)'** In other words, your policy on this matter demonstrates apparent favouritism towards one area at the expense of another, and this, in our opinion, in order to justify the closure of Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital, despite the fact that you have denied such a prospect for years. Additionally, by quoting the '1-3 patients' number that visit the unit in Ffestiniog every day, it is very apparent that you are seeking to make a case for the unit's closure, not on a 'temporary' basis, as you claim, but permanently! From bitter experience, we now know that the following words are a cynical pledge **'The**

situation will be closely monitored during this time. 'Since 2005, the GLHB, followed by BCUHB, have deliberately gone about eroding services from the Memorial Hospital, by cutting the number of beds, and consequently, causing lack of privacy for patients by turning the Men's Ward, at an incredible cost of £70,000, into a physiotherapy department which has little use made of it by today, due to the way that service is run from Ysbyty Alltwen. During the process, a smaller ward was also lost which had a palliative care bed and the Minor Injuries hours were cut from 24 hours to 10 hours and now they are down to none at all! We have voiced our concerns consistently over the years but the Health Board did not listen to us at all. Having witnessed the service at the Memorial Hospital shrinking from year to year, and now from month to month - is it any wonder as to why we suspect that the Health Board has a hidden agenda?

- iv. With all respect, BCUHB's tactics are no different to those of the Gwynedd Health Board back in 2005. But maybe we should not be surprised at all, given that the same people are still running it today. Can I please ask you not to treat us like fools who cannot see or understand what is going on behind closed doors!

Forgive the bitterness in this letter but there is, by now, a worthy justification for it.

Yours sincerely,

Geraint V. Jones (Chairman of Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital)

Cc. Lord Dafydd Elis-Thomas AM

Elfyn Llwyd MP



Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol
Betsi Cadwaladr
University Health Board

Ein cyf / Our ref: MB/SB/9014/399

Eich cyf / Your ref:

☎: 01248 384910

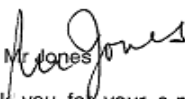
Gofynnwch am / Ask for: Mary Burrows

Ffacs / Fax: 01248 384937

E-bost / Email: mary.burrows@wales.nhs.uk

Dyddiad / Date: 8 February 2013

Mr Geraint V Jones
Chair
Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital Defence Committee
geraint_jones3@sky.com

Dear Mr Jones 

Thank you for your e-mail raising a number of queries regarding Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital and I apologise for the delay in replying.

The Minor Injuries Unit at the Hospital remains closed because of ongoing staff sickness which leaves us with insufficient capacity safely to cover the Unit.

The number of beds provided at the Hospital has been maintained at a level of 10 beds. The nursing staffing available is insufficient to cover 12 beds, given the level of need of patients. Unfortunately therefore it has not been possible to reopen the additional beds in the interim.

The Voluntary Early Release Scheme to which you refer is a nationally agreed scheme and applies to all staff across the Health Board. The provisions of this scheme have been in place since 2009. The scheme has been readvertised to staff at various points. This scheme is not targeted at staff in the Gwynedd area; however we cannot discriminate against staff by refusing to consider applications from this area either. All applications are considered in the light of the needs of the business; if a member of staff applies who is in a critical post which cannot be released, that application is unlikely to succeed, unless other service areas could be reconfigured to make sure that critical post can be covered.

Finally, I would like to assure you that the arguments and concerns that you have raised at our meeting on 24 October 2012 have been considered fully. The concerns raised in response to the consultation proposals - and significant communications received before that date - have been highlighted to the Board in the discussions that have been held. The proposal put forward for consideration of Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital as an additional hub has also been considered. These matters formed part of the consideration of the Health Board at the meeting held on Friday 18 January 2013, at which the recommendations following the consultation were reviewed and decisions made by the Board.

Yours sincerely


MARY BURROWS
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Cyfeiriad Goheblaeth ar gyfer y Cadeirydd a'r Prif Weithredwr / Correspondence address for Chairman and Chief Executive:
Swyddfa'r Gweithredwyr / Executives' Office
Ysbyty Gwynedd, Penrhosgarnedd
Bangor, Gwynedd LL57 2PW

Gwefan: www.pbc.cymru.nhs.uk / Web: www.bcu.wales.nhs.uk

[Extracts from the correspondence with Merfyn Jones, the first Chairman of the BCUHB](#)

12 February, 2013.

Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital Defence Committee

Dear **Professor Merfyn Jones**,

I received your letter yesterday and from reading it I was disappointed to find the usual clichés. You claim that BCUHB gave *'thorough consideration to all the responses that came to hand'* and *'you listened to the viewpoints of those who responded to the consultation'*. You are therefore suggesting that all of those viewpoints have been refused, even the arguments presented to you by our local doctors and every one (apart from one!) of our elected representatives?

May I, therefore, remind you of the consultation thus far -?

(a) **March to June 2012** - A series of consultative meetings with representatives of the local stakeholders groups - medics, nurses, county and town councillors, Cwmni Seren who work with people with learning disabilities, Friends of the Hospital and us as the Defence Committee. Some of them had taken two hours off from work to be there. But the Board did not have the courtesy to send any one apart from Clare Jones to the first meeting expecting her to not only answer every question - which she was not able to do - but to take minutes as well!

Total discontent was expressed with that situation but when the exact same thing happened at the second meeting, all the representatives stood up and walked out in protest. Yes, John Jones, the Nursing Officer did appear at one of the following meetings but we managed to glean very little important information from him. And Dr Bill Whitehead was sent to represent you at one or two other committees and to respond to the concerns of three doctors who had more experience than him! What kind of insult was this? And, in any case, how was he chosen as a spokesman for the Board, as he represents another practice within the same county, and more-so, represents another hospital which had possibly more to gain from seeing the closure of Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital. Should he not have 'declared an interest' before expressing his opinion? But he did not do that!

(b) **6 September, 2012** - Three consultation sessions lasting 1¼ hours each in Blaenau Ffestiniog with room for an audience of no more than 60 in every session. Therefore, some 180 from catchment with a population of 7,000 plus! At one of those sessions, Mr Geoff Lang openly promised that every argument and every concern would be recorded and considered by the Board members.

(c) **4 October, 2012** - A delegation of us (including two experienced GPs) met with you and Mary Burrows and Geoff Lang at Ysbyty Gwynedd, when the latter two were very busy taking detailed notes and giving the impression, at least, that our arguments were valid and

deserving of your consideration. You yourself were witness to it all! And we went home that day in full belief that your promise was genuine and we would see some change in the Board's attitude. We must have been very naive that time as well!

The message of your latest letter is that every argument presented at the above meetings was refused by the Board members, as they saw no need to change any of the details of the original plans. And you know that this is the message of your Chief Executive, Mary Burrows, also in her letter, dated a day later than your letter - '*I would like to assure you that the arguments and concerns that you have raised ... have been considered fully ... The proposal put forward for consideration of Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital as an additional hub has also been considered.*' A bare statement that does not even go to the bother of saying that the application has been refused, let alone explain why! Was it too much for us to expect you or her to also respond to the arguments in the petition for creating a hub hospital in Blaenau? A petition signed by doctors and nurses, county and town councillors and a number of other elected representatives! Responding with a 'No!' and nothing more is discourteous to say the least! Nonetheless, we hear that an application from another hospital to be the 8th hub has been accepted! It would be interesting to find out who pushed that application forward. It was obviously someone who was privy to the Board members and who had considerably more influence than the people of north Meirionnydd and south Conwy.

The truth is that BCUHB believes that it is entitled to act as a dictatorship, exactly like its predecessor, the Gwynedd Local Health Board. But of course, we should not be surprised at all, given that many of the same people are still steering the ship - e.g. from Gwynedd, Grace Lewis Parry, Dr Lyndon Miles and others. You must know by now what people's opinions are across north Wales (as with the Hywel Dda Health Board area in the south), and that is that the entire consultation process has been expensive and a complete farce and that you, by pushing your plans forward, come what may, are going to endanger the lives of scores if not hundreds of people in the coming months. The Francis Report in England, and David Cameron's condemnation of the maladministration by the Stafford area health board, should be warning enough in itself.

You claim that closing Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital and losing all of the services linked to it (minor injuries, x-ray etc.) is a way of improving the health service in this area and of securing patient safety. With all respect, using such an argument is an outright insult to one's intelligence. It has been the Board's policy (as with GLHB before it) not to tolerate individual examples of maladministration as it is contrary to confidentiality acts etc. Nevertheless, I am going to list three examples as the individuals in question, or close family members, are happy for me to do so.

(i) *(Extraction from a letter to Edwina Hart, 4 August 2008)*

Dear Minister,

You might have heard from the representative of our electorate, Lord Dafydd Ellis Thomas, about two recent cases in Blaenau Ffestiniog when a 64 year old lady and a gentleman, also in his sixties, died of heart attacks before the paramedics were able to reach them. In the first case, the ambulance took 29 minutes to reach the patient, after having to rush from Barmouth, thirty miles away. A week later, it took 22 minutes for an ambulance to reach another patient. In both cases, the patients died before the paramedics even saw them and the experience was very traumatic for the families, as you can imagine...

*... Another crucial part of the same problem is the 'Out of Hours' policy imposed on the local memorial hospital. Thanks to the Gwynedd Local Health Board, the hospital staff can no longer open their doors to outpatients after 6pm, and this has been made crystal clear to the people of this area over the last three years. There is talk locally, whether it's true or not, that some of the nurses have been disciplined for breaching this rule! The relevant point in all of this is - **Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital has its own defibrillator and the staff have received training on how to use it. Yet, on these two nights in question, two people died while that crucial equipment had to remain unused.** Should these families have felt that they had the right to take their loved ones directly to hospital rather than wait in vain for an ambulance to arrive in time, then who knows, we could have avoided two tragedies. But we will never know either way, and by now, the two people who died, are no more than bare statistics on file in the Health Service. It is no surprise at all that the people of this area are concerned about the Health Board's plans.*

(ii) The second example relates to a 91 year old lady, who now lives in a home for the elderly in Llan Ffestiniog. One evening, less than a month ago, she fell and hit her head and an ambulance was called to take her to Ysbyty Gwynedd; a journey which, as you know, is nigh on 35 miles one way. When Mrs _____ daughter, who lives in Oswestry, was told of the accident, she called to enquire about her. It was by now midnight and there was heavy snowfall. She heard that her mother had still not been seen by a doctor. But when he arrived at last, he decided that there was no reason to keep her in and she was sent home, despite the cold weather. It was 4.00 in the morning when she arrived home! A 91 year old lady! Five hours later the elderly lady was taken once again to Ysbyty Gwynedd after falling the second time, and there were no beds available for her

at Blaenau or at Alltwen, and she was kept there for some days. Today, she's back at Bangor again, and is far more poorly than before. But this time, once again, she had to lie in a corridor on an ambulance trolley for more than two hours, and the two paramedics once again had to stay with her and were very angry that a person of her age was being ignored in such a way.

- (iii) The third example is included in the enclosed letter. An example such as this is no exception, where patients from this area are sent to Ysbyty Alltwen and then straight on from there to Ysbyty Gwynedd as there is no one at Porthmadog hospital who can treat such wounds; that is, a task as simple as stitching a cut! *'A new hospital with modern facilities and the capacity to assist more patients'* according to the Board's definition.

The irony!

There are more examples that I could list, but the question that you must answer is this - Does the Health Board still claim that 'patient *safety*' is your priority? In yours and Mary Burrows' presentation *'Health Care in Wales is Changing - Join the Discussion'* you say: *'The purpose of these proposals is to change the way in which some services are provided, and also their location in order to attain high standards'*. Would you agree that the above examples make a mockery of such a statement? You proceed to say *'we now want to build on these discussions and ask for your point of view and opinion. Your voice is important ...'* The rank and file of the north Wales population would agree with me that that one is also a bad joke! Bureaucratic language and nothing more!

If BCUHB wants to continue to act heedlessly, and close small hospitals and ancillary services, you do not need a crystal ball to forecast that more lives will be lost. And who knows that a situation will not arise very soon where there will be call in Wales for a report similar to that of the Francis report in England? Should this happen, it will be impossible to hide behind any clichés, and the question will be asked, 'How can health board members, who are paid a total salary of £1,600,000 and more every year, justify closing a small effective hospital that costs only half that amount (£800,000 to run)? Of course, it is unlikely that the Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital Defence Committee will even exist by that time, but we have plenty of evidence to submit albeit.

You say that you 'understand the feelings of resentment and disappointment amongst us, protesters, however, with all due respect, I am afraid that those words are also merely clichéd.

Yours sincerely,

Geraint V. Jones (Chairman of the Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital Defence Committee)

.....

18 February 2013.

Dear Professor Merfyn Jones,

This is a follow up to the letter I sent to you two days ago, where I referred to how an elderly 91 year old lady, who had been mistreated at Ysbyty Gwynedd three weeks ago, when she was sent back to the Bryn Blodau home in Llan Ffestiniog in icy conditions at 4 in the morning. I regret to inform you that Mrs _____ died last Saturday afternoon and I can say that the family are very angry about the way she was treated.

I also refer you to the front page of the Caernarfon and Denbigh Herald (14 February) where a lady called _____ pays a tribute to the care her father, _____ of Dolwyddelan, received during his last days at Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital, unlike the way in which he was treated at Ysbyty Gwynedd, a few days prior. He died of cancer at the Memorial Hospital a month ago and this is his daughter's evidence of what happened to him at Ysbyty Gwynedd - *'During the four nights he was there, he was moved four times – one of the moves happened at 3am. He had become severely visually impaired which completely disorientated him, which she says was worsened by having to move around so frequently ... The dressings on his legs had not been changed, or even looked at, until the discharge day.'* Mr _____ was sent home in heavy snowfall, in an ambulance car, and had to go through Llanbedrog and Pwllheli and Porthmadog and Blaenau Ffestiniog before reaching his home in Dolwyddelan. A two hour journey! And here is the Health Board's response to Ms _____ complaint following her father's death - *'A spokeswoman for the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board said "We would like to express our condolences to Mrs _____ and her family at this very sad time. Unfortunately, due to patient confidentiality, we are unable to comment on individual cases".'* Goodness me! And a ready-made explanation like this excuses all of it, I suppose? But the time will come when the Health Board will have no choice but to respond in full to a court of law to a number of examples of maladministration.

I am bringing these matters to your attention as I know, from bitter experience, that I can expect nothing from other Health Board officers other than empty promises to look into the matter. Nevertheless, I close with this quotation by you and your Chief Executive, again from your booklet *'Health Care in Wales is Changing' – 'Imagine how health care could be in the 21 century, for you, your family, your parents and your children.'* With all due respect, in the context of the above mentioned cases, and several other examples I could refer to, your words sound more like a threat than a promise! It is therefore no surprise that the Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital Defence Committee

has sought legal opinion on the entire process and we will also call, very soon, for a judicial review of the way in which BCUHB has pushed its plans forward in the face of opposition, counter arguments and evidence. We had hoped that we could persuade the Board to turn the Memorial Hospital into one of its hub hospitals for rural north Meirion and south Conwy but our arguments and evidence were totally ignored by you, and such attitude contravenes every democratic procedure.

Yours sincerely,

Geraint V. Jones (Chairman)

NO ANSWER

A selection of the correspondence with Dr Peter Higson (Chairman of the BCUHB and the successor of Merfyn Jones)

03.05.14

Dear Dr Higson,

I will not deny that your most recent letter has disappointed us greatly here in Stiniog. Despite our hopes, it appears that you are not willing to consider any of our arguments for getting our hospital back and for that reason, I do not see any purpose in challenging some of your arguments either, although it could be very easily done. Instead, I ask you to fairly consider these following facts -

We have claimed more than once in the past that BCUHB favours other areas at the expense of this area ('discrimination' is the word we used). The Board has denied this many times but the claim is truer today than it has ever been. For example, we have been arguing for years that the main aim of this Health Board from the outset has been to save money, but this has been denied time and time again. It is only fair, therefore, for me to draw attention once again to some of that deception by referring you to three quotes from the 'Progress Report to Service Planning Committee' which appeared in January of this year (oddly enough, directly after the Project Board voted in favour of the plans!) -

'The Building will house primary care Services, and an increased range of health and social care Services.' The second clause is a lie, and it would be very easy to prove it!

'Services will be closer to home, preventing the need to travel' - Lies again, at least as far as this area is in the question.

But the most revealing fact in the Report is -

'Developing a new Centre on the FfMH site will mean that the old Health Centre Building [i.e. the one in use at the moment!] will no longer be required, although the X-ray extension of the Health Centre site is likely to be needed for a car park). This estate rationalisation will generate savings in terms of running costs and together with improved efficiency costs of the redeveloped FfMH site, should mean that the associated benefits will be demonstrated in the next 2 – 4 years.'

[By the way, the x-ray building is not an extension of the Health Centre at all as it was constructed many years before the Health Centre existed, and it is also a much better building, as you saw for yourselves.]

But there is no discrimination against us, they say. Nor any favouritism for others. How do you therefore interpret what is currently going on in the Flint area? Is the Health Board going to deny recent reports in the press that Flint are going to get their hospital back (and good luck to them, of course), as well as more services than they had originally, and this because your Vice-chair happens to be the wife of the Labour MP who's seat in Westminster is under threat? If there is no 'favouritism' there, then I do not know the meaning of the word.

I'm sorry to appear bitter, Dr Higson, but after so many years of campaigning, the people of this area have the right to feel very bitter, and the recent appointment of a new Chief Executive does nothing at all to raise our hopes, given the name he made for himself in his previous post.

One small but important point to close. Your letter suggests that you are more than happy with the service offered at Ysbyty Alltwen. Can I kindly suggest that asking some of the clients and their families (even from the Porthmadog area itself!) would underline how effective this place is in truth.

Please forgive me once more for my resentment and frustration.

Sincerely,

Geraint.

.....

07.07.14

Dear Peter,

Thank you again for your letter but it did nothing, I am afraid, to restore my faith in the Health Board. There has been significant changes to the BCUHB personnel during the last year, and several have left under a cloud, but as far as I can see, the new leadership has not changed one bit of the plans of those former officers and we do not have to look far for the reason. The saving of three quarters of a million and more, as a result of closing our memorial hospital, explains everything.

You believe that this area should be more than grateful for all the new services that will be available to us, but with all respect, Peter, your claim is misleading and incorrect, as is evident in the 'Blaenau Doctors' appendix. In it, you will see a letter from our Local Practice in 2012 to Mr Geoff Lang challenging some of Dr Ed Roberts' findings in his report to Edwina Hart. In it the doctors list the services that were here at the time. (Unless your predecessor threw it away, then the document 'Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital Defence Committee's Response to Dr Ed Roberts' Report' should be in your files somewhere. But it may be that it was thrown in the bin as neither Mr Lang nor any other member of the Board bothered to respond to the doctors' observations or to the Defence Committee, to their shame. But there we go; it is easier to close your eyes to the truth if it does not fit in with your plans!) However, by looking at the list of doctors once again, do you really expect the people of this area to accept your argument that they will be better off under the new arrangement?

I have also, in response to your request, attached a copy of the letter sent to Dr Bill Whitehead last October (*'a considerable time ago'* in your words, but if it takes 8 months and more to respond to or ignore letters then there could be a cynical reason for the delay!) However, although you have tried to justify Dr Whitehead's appointment, I realize that you have avoided the ONE key question I asked, namely do you believe that it is ETHICALLY correct for a doctor in one practice to lead discussions about cutting more than three quarters of a million pounds from health services within a nearby area? I have raised this question with others more than once in the past and I am still awaiting an honest answer to it. This is an important matter of principle under any democratic order and perhaps the only way of getting to the bottom of the question in the end will be to hand it to the English media.

You also say that the Project Board 'has agreed on the chairman'. Don't the minutes of that board meeting show that at least one member, namely Councillor Linda Wyn Jones, questioned the appointment? After all, she was the chair of the Implementation Committee, namely the Project Board's predecessor, and did she not ask for an explanation not only as to why that committee was abolished without prior notice but also as to why Dr Whitehead's name was suggested so quickly to

chair the Project Board? Do not tell me that the Health Board did not heavily influence that decision as well.

Another real disappointment was reading your attempt to belittle our latest petition. You did the same also in your last correspondence to me, regarding the outcome of our questionnaire. The suggestion at that time was that the public had voted in ignorance and that we were at fault for not explaining to them all the implications of your plans, as a Board, for building the Hospital. Surely, it was not our responsibility to do this? Yes, the Project Board did try to arrange an opportunity in the town to outline its plans but only a handful took it up, partly due to the wet and stormy weather it seems. But did they go about arranging a second opportunity once the weather improved? No! Therefore do not throw the responsibility for educating the public at us. Your letter suggests that every petition launched by the residents of this area over the years have been entirely powerless. *'It is important to understand the facts being presented to those who are asked to sign petitions in relation to the development in Blaenau Ffestiniog,'* you say. And that was BCUHB's excuse for ignoring our petitions, it seems, that is to claim that the public are not familiar enough with the background to be able to vote sensibly? This suggestion insults the intelligence of the people of the area and speaks volumes about how Bureaucracy works!

In another paragraph you seek to make your case for making an exception of Tywyn Hospital. This argument is also very weak, I'm afraid. You talk about the new equipment there being funded by 'the generosity of the Tywyn Hospital Appeals Committee'. Fair enough, but when the Defence Committee, jointly with the Friends of the Hospital, in 2008 contributed half the cost (£150,000) towards constructing an extension for a new ward for the men, we did not even receive the courtesy of a response from the Board, apart from a brief word months later rejecting the idea without any reasoning. The architectural plans and all the details submitted by us at the time should also be in your file, Peter. But why is generosity in Tywyn acknowledged while the greater generosity of this area was disregarded? Do you still maintain that the Health Board does not show favouritism between one area and another?

Whilst I'm on that point, can I repeat a request I made to you in my last letter, namely -

*'If favouritism was not shown to any area over another, can I ask how BCUHB went about weighing up between different areas in north west Wales. **The Board had to produce a document weighing up the situation, not only here in Stiniog but also in the Tywyn, Dolgellau, Alltwen, Pwllheli and Caernarfon areas. I would like to request a copy of that***

document, Peter, in order to see what exactly were the arguments for providing better service to the less-populated but more Anglicised towns on the coast..'

Before I finish, I wish to quote the last paragraph from my article to our local paper in February this year, more than five months ago -

It is no longer a secret that Dr Tom Parry and Dr Dawn Jones have been under immense work pressure since the reorganisation. What if one of them - or both even! - decides to leave and join another practice to have an easier life? (After all. the Councillor herself has suggested that any other practice in north west Wales would welcome them with open arms.) What will happen to us here? Have the members of the Project Board considered this possibility, I wonder? The possibility of having a hospital, not only without any beds, but also without any doctors? And has the Town Council considered another possibility, namely the embarrassment for the area's people in seeing a £4m building turning into a white elephant right before our eyes.

May I suggest politely that the implications of such a scenario are something for the Health Board to pour over in detail, and very soon.

Sincerely,

Geraint.

25.09.2014

Dear Peter,

You won't welcome another letter from me, I know. I realise the work pressure you are under nowadays but I hope that you also realise the increasing concerns in this area regarding the evident deterioration of the health service in this area. I know that you have sought to justify BCUHB's past mistakes but the situation has been increasingly getting worse since the Health Board's decision to close our memorial hospital in January 2012 and the unusual urgency to do so before the end of March by moving the beds, removing all kitchen equipment etc. It is very apparent to all of us that the entire reason for the urgency was to quickly pacify local protests.

We realise that you were not in your job when those hot-headed decisions were taken and that a number of officers had to leave due to the increasing difficulties that came to bear, but there are a

few officers still with you, and perhaps it is them and not you who should answer some questions. This one, for example - Was it not MANDATORY (legally, perhaps?) for the Health Board to establish crucial services such as 'Domiciliary Care' **BEFORE** closing the Hospital? But because of the great urgency, this did not happen, and consequently, there was no hope for the arrangement to succeed, and by today the morale of the nurses and the carers- let alone the doctors! - has completely disappeared. The argument in your letter dated 29 May was misleading to say the least, where you referred to '*Higher Level Domiciliary Care in Meirionnydd*'. But this was a plan for the entire county, intended just as much for areas such as Dolgellau and Barmouth and Tywyn as it was for Stiniog.

In one of my recent letters to you I quoted something that was anticipated by us more than seven months ago in our local paper, namely the risk of losing the two doctors who are left here. By today, we know that this fear is now being realised within the coming months! What next? There is no doubt that it is the BCUHB's blunder that has caused this situation, and this despite all the arguments and protests from the area's people. And now the Board is trying to hide behind the excuse that other areas across north Wales also have difficulty in attracting doctors!

We also know that a number of our district nurses intend to retire as soon as possible as they are fed up and disillusioned with their working conditions. Consider once more the excellent plans (on paper, at least!) that were promised to us during the 'consultation' period - '*Imagine how health care could look in the 21 century, for you, your family, your parents and your children.*' Your predecessor and the former chief executive owned those words (see the Introduction for 'Health Care in North Wales is Changing'). We were uncertain of the promise at the time but neither we nor anyone else imagined that the Health Board would allow things to deteriorate as swiftly as this. '*If our plans succeed, Blaenau Ffestiniog will show the way forward to the remainder of Wales.*' Dr Whitehead's words, last year! *Note that it's 'If' and not 'When'!* He must have had doubts in his mind as well, then. He still pressed on with the plans, nonetheless. A wholly irresponsible attitude if you ask me.

In my most recent letter to you, five months ago, I asked questions regarding the propriety of appointing someone like him chairman of the Project Board. I asked the same thing to your predecessor and to the former Chief Executive and the fact that I am still awaiting answers suggests that the Board has something to hide. May I suggest, and not without reason, that Mr Geoff Lang should be the one to answer these questions?

In the same letter, I also made the following request - '*The Board had to produce a document weighing up the situation, not only here in Stiniog but also in the Tywyn, Dolgellau, Alltwen, Pwllheli*

and Caernarfon areas. I would like to request a copy of that document, Peter, in order to see what exactly were the arguments for providing better service to the less-populated but more Anglicised towns on the coast.' But I did not receive this information, either.

A fortnight ago I took advantage of the opportunity to visit Tywyn Memorial Hospital, partly to photograph the memorial panels there, as one of my grandfathers was amongst those from that area who fell in the Great War. Believe you me, I was envious of the building work that was taking place there, especially when I saw the happy smile on the face of one of the nurses as she explained the exciting developments that were afoot to me. Are you surprised Peter, that the people of the Stiniog area are still waiting for the Health Board to explain this apparent favouritism towards one area, and that at the expense of another area within the county?

By asking them again, surely my questions will be addressed by someone or other within the Health Board.

Sincerely,

Geraint (on behalf of Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital Defence Committee)

NO RESPONSE TO THE ABOVE

12.11.2014

Dear Peter,

I'm very disappointed that you have not responded to my enquiries regarding the propriety of appointing Dr Bill Whitehead as chair of the Project Board here in Stiniog (see my e-mail letters to you dated 25 June and 25 September of this year). I accept that you had nothing to do with that decision, of course, but your silence on the matter speaks volumes.

I am just as disappointed that there was no response to the following request from me (this was also submitted twice, in the same e-mail letters mentioned above) - ***'The Board had to produce a document weighing up the situation, not only here in Stiniog but also in the Tywyn, Dolgellau, Alltwen, Pwllheli and Caernarfon areas. I would like to request a copy of that document, Peter, in order to see what exactly the arguments were for providing better service to the less-populated but more Anglicised towns on the coast.'*** Why is BCUHB reluctant to divulge the content of this

document? Is it because of the evident favouritism it contains? I very much hope that I will not have to submit a request under the Freedom of Information Act to see it.

Lastly, allow me to refer to a letter a gentleman from Blaenau received from Mr Geoff Lang a few days ago. Some of the things said in this letter are incredulous to say the least! Consider the sentences underlined by me in his response:-

'I wish to assure you that there is no health crisis in Blaenau Ffestiniog. The intention of the letter you received updating you on the Health Board's plans was to reassure you that the practice will not be closing, and that the Health Board is working to ensure that General Medical Services continue to be provided in a safe and sustainable manner to the residents of the area. Meddygon y Blaenau have said that they will be terminating their contract at the end of January but neither their resignation nor losing two previous GPs working at the Practice is linked to the closure of beds at the Memorial Hospital. The Health Board is working hard to develop the plans for the new Primary Care Centre which will offer a number of additional services to the area's residents in their own community, and I am certain that you will welcome them.' No health crisis. Goodness me!

- (i) If Mr Lang, of all people, who holds such a crucial role within BCUHB (Executive Director of Primary, Community and Mental Health) does not realise the state of things in this area, then God help us!

When was he last in this area I wonder? Not since the consultation sessions in September 2012, maybe? Since then, of course, the Hospital has been closed, the minor injuries service has been lost, our x-ray unit has disappeared, the Llan Ffestiniog surgery has closed and the opening hours of the Dolwyddelan surgery have been severely cut, we heard of the intentions of our two GPs to leave the Practice and the intentions of as many as four of the five community nurses to retire or resign. Add to that the serious lack of carers in the community....etc. And Mr Lang, the gentleman who is responsible for these services, says there is no crisis? Seeing that he is able to speak with such authority, one must ask or imagine where exactly does he get his information, if not directly, perhaps from the chairman of the Project Board!

It would be interesting to see his response to a few comments in Professor Marcus Longley's recent report (given, of course that he has read it).

- (ii) Medical Services are provided in a safe and sustainable manner for the residents of the area. With all due respect, this man does not live on the same planet as us, here! For example, did he hear about the recent accident suffered by a lady who is an invalid **when the fire service had to be called to saw a piece of 'hoist' which had penetrated the flesh in her shoulder?**
- (iii) He also denies that closing the Memorial Hospital had anything to do with losing doctors from the area. That risk was shared with him personally, and with other representatives of the Health Board, as far as two and a quarter years ago, during one of the (alleged) consultation sessions. And you are also aware, Peter, that the Defence Committee also foretold as far back as February of this year in our local paper, that we would lose our doctors as a consequence of closing the Memorial Hospital. (see the third paragraph of my most recent letter to you 25/09/2014). If it was so painfully obvious to us here, then shouldn't Mr Lang, of all people, by virtue of his post, have realised this danger? Talk about burying your head in the sand!

Mr Geoff Lang also openly promised that every argument and every concern would be recorded and considered by the Board members. But nothing more was heard about it, despite seeking answers at a later date. And the Board's plans did not change at all! It must be concluded, therefore, that the promises made on that day were nothing but empty words - lies even!

- (iv) **'... offer a number of additional services to the area's residents in their own community... and I am certain that you will welcome them.'** *Why won't Mr Lang come here to show us exactly where those services are hiding?* And while he's here, maybe he should try to explain to a few families in the area that it is only fair to expect them to travel to Ysbyty Alltwen every day or even as far as Bryn Beryl, if they wish to comfort their loved ones who are patients in those places.

A week ago there were as many as 11 patients, from Blaenau itself, filling up the beds at Ysbyty Gwynedd. Some of them, who were recovering, staying for several days until there was space for

them in Alltwen, or Bryn Beryl even, and these issues were also creating problems at YG itself, of course. According to what I've heard, the same type of situation still exists there today.

Should the Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital have remained open, this problem would not have raised its head, and families would not have to travel 70 miles back and forth every day to visit their loved ones. But it does not appear that Mr Lang, or BCUHB for that matter, has much sympathy for that argument either.

You have denied more than once that BCUHB has demonstrated bias towards other areas at the expense of this area. I therefore refer you to appendix 11 from Professor Marcus Longley's report which includes the lists, provided by BCUHB itself, of the services that are available today in Meirionnydd. It is quite true that the people of Dolgellau and Tywyn have no reason to complain! But the Board decided to close Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital back in January and by today, 10 months later, all we are offered is this - *'The precise pattern of services in this hospital is currently being reviewed'*. With all due respect, Peter, these words make a complete mockery of what Mr Lang said in his letter, let alone all the promises made by the Board in the past.

Tomorrow, Ffestiniog Town Council will consider holding a referendum, similar to that in Flint, in order to ascertain the wishes of the people of Blaenau and Llan Ffestiniog regarding the future of the Memorial Hospital building. The Dolwyddelan Community Council has already decided in favour of holding such a vote, and I have no doubt that Stiniog will also make the same decision. Doubtless, you will argue once more, as you did with our questionnaires and our recent petition that people will be voting in ignorance. If so, shouldn't the Board arrange a public meeting in good time, here in Blaenau, in order to educate the public?

Sincerely, and with as much concern as ever,

Geraint.

.....

Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital Defence Committee

Dear Peter,

I received your response to my letter dated 12.11.2014 and I acknowledge the fact that you went to considerable trouble to create it and I am grateful to you for this. Nevertheless, your arguments do not in any way offer a satisfactory response to our concerns, but I imagine that you will have already suspected this.

I note that you once more avoid answering the question regarding Dr Whitehead - ***How ethical was it to appoint him chair of the Project Board and how ethical was it for him to accept?*** - You say that he was undertaking his work 'in accordance with the requirements of his role as Local Area Lead and Clinical Director' but this does not change the fact that he was placed in a very beneficial situation in terms of his own practice, and his own hospital in Dolgellau. And that is why I'm enquiring about how ethical this is. During one of the consultative sessions in September 2012, with Mr Lang and another half a dozen 'specialists' from BCUHB facing the audience, Dr Tom Parry stood to express concerns regarding the future of the Practice, should the Board's plans be adopted and the Memorial Hospital closed. He spoke passionately for some minutes and outlined exactly the same type of situation that exists here today. And what was Mr Lang's response at the time? *'I think I'll ask Dr Whitehead, who's sitting next to you, to answer that!'* That is, to ask another GP in the audience, who was a stranger to everyone at the time, to answer on behalf of the Health Board! It was shameful, and an insult not only to an experienced doctor such as Tom Parry but also to the Practice, and I felt the need to say this openly before the meeting ended. And what was Mr Lang's response? To ignore the comment with a weak smile, as though other people's opinions counted for nothing! Typical, I'm sorry to say Peter, of BCUHB's arrogant attitude from the outset!

Recently, a delegation of us was invited to appear before the Gwynedd Community Health Council. The discussion was held entirely through the medium of Welsh and there was no doubt regarding the members' sympathy and support of our cause. The attitude of the Health Board members, on the other hand, is much more English and more perverse to our concerns as Welsh-speakers but there is nothing new there either.

You say this in your latest letter - *'As part of the consultation, the concerns raised in relation to closing services before other options were made available were discussed in detail during public meetings. At the time, we stated clearly that we did not have the additional revenue to establish new services alongside the old services and we would therefore need a period of transition while facilities for inpatients were closed before retraining and recruiting staff to operate new community services.'* As you were not in post at the time, maybe you would like to ask Mr Geoff Lang to explain when exactly this was expressly said to the people of this area? And by whom? More importantly, ask him to explain when and where it was said, openly, that we would have to wait year before *any new services reach us*. Two and a quarter years have already elapsed since those consultative meetings and in the meantime health care in this area has taken an enormous step backwards! I'm old enough, Peter, to remember what it was like here in 1945, at the end of the World War, and I can say with all honesty that things are more desperate today than they were at that time even!

And who apart from BCUHB is to blame for this? But, Mr Lang does not seem to be concerned either way, of course! In fact, I doubt that he has been anywhere near Stiniog since that fateful day or that he has lost any sleep over the mess he and his like have created. Yet again, you continue to argue, Peter, that the officers of the Board have not shown any discrimination against this area?

In your second paragraph, you refer to the arrangement for a delegation of us to meet '*with the Chairman of the Board, the Chief Executive and the Director of Primary Care*'. Yes, there was a meeting, and as I have already mentioned, they made a show of listening to our concerns and worries and of taking many notes. But that was the end of it! We heard no more about it, and as none of the Board's plans were changed following the meeting, it must be concluded that our concerns were once again brushed under BCUHB's thick carpet. In other words, the meeting was nothing more than a bluff, and the Board officers' attitude is despicable, and I'm surprised that you chose to use that meeting as an example of the Board's willingness to listen!

You also state in your letter 'that the Board fully appreciates the strength of feeling in the community of Blaenau regarding the closure of beds at the hospital'? Did we not hear your predecessor, and the Health Minister and his predecessor, saying the same thing, time and time again? The latest example came from Mr Drakeford himself, exactly a week ago! – '*I would like to reassure the Committee* [i.e. The Memorial Hospital Defence Committee] *that I do understand how strongly people feel about their local health services, and I note the committee's concerns expressed in your letter.*' With all due respect, Peter, this area needs more than insincere sympathy.

I realise that you have plenty of other problems on your plate. That is why I don't expect you to respond to this letter as you still continue to support the Board's decisions despite every argument. '*Your voice is important!*' That is what your predecessor said in his introduction to the 'Health Care in North Wales is Changing' booklet. .Yes, you listened to the voice of a few areas, such as Tywyn for example, but the voice of the people of this area was totally ignored and if Mr Lang and the like wish to deny the claim, then I challenge them to prove otherwise.

'Imagine how health care could be in the 21st century, for you, your family, your parents and your children.' said your predecessor! Looking back on it today, those words were more of a threat than a promise, and for the people of this area, that threat has already turned into something very real!

For information, Peter, the Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital Defence Committee was formed exactly 10 year ago, and as you can see from the front page of our local paper in the appendix, the doubts had started to appear even then, and our fight has been consistent since that time. (You would not thank me if I sent to you every article published and every letter sent by us since those early days!). Many

rallies have been held, more than one petition submitted and more than one delegation sent to discuss with various Board officers - the Gwynedd Local Health Board initially, and then BCUHB - where we got the same response every time *'that the Board fully appreciates the strength of feeling in the Blaenau community about the closure of beds at the hospital'* (or words to that effect) and then the key word *'but....'*! That is a nice way, time and time again, of brushing our concerns under the carpet as though the people of this area do not deserve the same considerations as the residents of Porthmadog, Tywyn and Pwllheli and other coastal towns do. And by today I have been given to understand that the Chief Executive has decided, using some convenient formula he has, that we now only need 2.5 GPs! Goodness me! If two experienced doctors, who knew the area and its people, failed to cope with the work pressure (It was 6.30 - 8.00 on them being able to go home nearly every evening!), then how long, do you think, these two new ones will last? And once they decide to leave, what then? The same problem raising its head again? And the same old excuses yet again? And will Mr Lang still claim 'there is no health crisis in Blaenau Ffestiniog'? Is the Chief Executive - a gentleman who earns more salary than the Prime minister of Great Britain! - so short sighted that he does not realise this probability?

There are a few other things in your letter that I could challenge but it seems that enough is enough and I will not take up any more of your time. Before I finish, however, I would like to take this opportunity to wish you happy holidays and a full and healthy New Year to you and your family.

Very Sincerely,

Geraint

10.04.2015

Dear Peter,

I know that a meeting was arranged between us on 6 May and the Chief Executive and Mr Geoff Lang were also present there but there is another serious matter that I must raise first.

Within recent months, you will know that I have sought answers from you, and also from the Health Minister, to two of the following questions -

(i) How ethical was it to appoint Dr Bill Whitehead, a member of another medical practice in Meirionnydd, to chair the Project Board and to give him the responsibility of cutting £3/4 m and more (see the Health Board's own figures) from the budget of the health service in this area?

(ii) And how ethical was it for him, a professional, to accept that responsibility?

As with Mr Drakeford, you chose not to answer and that only confirms all of our suspicions about the Health Board's hidden agenda for this area, let alone those of the Minister himself. (You will have the correspondence between us both on file however, for information, I also attach the correspondence between me and Mr Drakeford, for you to see that his answers - or rather, lack of answers - suggest that he also has something to hide. Another example, possibly, of how Bureaucracy works?

But despite you ignoring them, the questions still remain, Peter,

Sincerely, and as genuinely and as concerned as ever.

Geraint.

NO ANSWER

.....

22.03.2016

Dear Peter,

A word to thank you first for coming to Blaenau to meet with us a week ago, but mostly and unfortunately, I wish to express our disappointment. Disappointment because the Health Board's attitude is completely uncompromising and unfair. Between you, you arrived there with having already prepared a counter argument for each of our complaints and concerns, and denied or ignored every example which proves that the services offered in this area is sub-standard. In a word, you were not prepared to submit to **any** of our arguments. But we should not be surprised because this has been the case since the beginning of our discussions with the Board, years ago.

We are also very familiar, of course, with the patronising attitude Geoff Lang has towards a Welsh-speaking area such as this one. I am afraid that he is of the same ilk as the former Chief Executive, David Purt, and we cannot very easily forget the farce of the insincere Consultation he held here, back in September 2012. But we had expected the rest of you to come with more open minds.

However, looking back at the discussion, it is obvious that the Board is not prepared to change any of its plans as far as this area is in question. By the end of the meeting it was apparent to everyone

that your only reason for coming to see us at all was to try to persuade us to cooperate with your unvarying plans as a Board. But we will not do that, Peter, not while the people of this area want us to continue to fight on their behalf to restore the important services that have been taken away from them. And not while BCUHB and the Health Minister show such bias towards the Anglicised and more successful areas on the coast.

BCUHB has consistently denied favouritism of any kind but is unable to offer any honest counter argument. Originally, the hospitals of Tywyn and Blaenau were earmarked £3.9m each but the spending in Tywyn has already risen to £5m+! Where will this additional money come from I wonder, if not from Cardiff? And how do you explain that the original costings of the health board were very inaccurate?

It is a fact that can no longer be denied, Peter, that the intention of Betsi from the outset was to save money in our part of the world and we have proven this to you more than once by quoting from the Health Board's own papers.

Taking everything into account, by today it is very easy to prove the allegation of discrimination against us.

LETTERS OF COMPLAINT

The meeting did not allow time for a detailed discussion on any specific subject, we accept this, but every argument and complaint submitted by us was being pushed to one side by you. For example, when there was mention of the Board's lack of response to the complaint letters submitted to PHC as far back as last June, Ffion Johnstone was very happy to defend herself by saying that she only received those letters a month ago. This is probably true but she has had time since then to respond to most of them, surely? But what about all the other letters that have been sent directly to the Board itself in recent years? Why are they never acknowledged, let alone responded to?

Both appendices are examples of those I am referring to. They were sent to the Board months ago but the correspondent, a pensioner, is still waiting for any form of response! Only yesterday, he was explaining to me how his mother, who is 94 years old and living in a care home for the elderly at Llan Ffestiniog, had been taken to Ysbyty Gwynedd as many as **NINE** times in total during the last nine months, and then sent back, more often than not, within a few hours, and sometimes during the early hours of the morning. Imagine! A lady as elderly and frail as she having to spend many hours travelling back and forth to Bangor in all weathers, and waiting in an ambulance to be seen. And the

reason why this is happening, it seems, is because the doctors of the Practice in Blaenau - a Practice that is by now in the care of Betsi itself, of course! - has either refused or failed to visit the Home in Llan Ffestiniog when needed! Consequently, the only option for the staff of the Home is to call the emergency services that then send an ambulance to transport the patient to Ysbyty Gwynedd, regardless of whether there is any real need for it!

Can you, Peter, name any other area in Gwynedd, or in Wales even, where something like this is allowed to happen? It is no surprise at all the doctors in A&E at Ysbyty Gwynedd are angry because of all the unnecessary visits and the waste of resources.

MEDDYGON Y BLAENAU PRACTICE [Now in the care of BCUHB]

When I referred to HIW's criticism of the way in which this Practice is being run, neither Mr Lang nor you were prepared to acknowledge the claim, or accept the criticism. Do you therefore refuse to accept the things said in that report? The following, for example - *'We looked at the practice development plan and saw that Meddygon y Blaenau had not participated in identifying some of the key Health issues or National Clinical priorities pertinent to patients registered at their practice due to other work constraints. These areas included smoking cessation, falls prevention* and cancer care ... The Health board's Head of Primary Care (West) informed us that plans have been outlined for a new development plan. However, this work is in its infancy ... Services need to be developed with consideration to patient needs in an area where high levels of deprivation are prevalent ...*

*... At the time of our inspection there was no system to monitor the effectiveness and consistency of record keeping. This would be particularly pertinent given the number of GP locums working at the practice **to ensure that satisfactory standards are maintained** ...*

... The business continuity arrangements did not cover unforeseen events such as GP annual or sickness leave or poor wintry weather conditions (which is a common occurrence in this practice area).

And what about the chapter *Quality of management and leadership* (page. 16 -18) ?

Need I go on, Peter? I could quote more if needed, for example the number of complaint letters you have been receiving for months about the attitude and conduct of one 'locum' GP in particular. You should know that a number of patients in the area, are now refusing appointments with him, and this is placing unacceptable strain on other doctors, especially the local GP, Dr Parry, I would

assume. But he is still being sent here, which again proves what little respect the Board has towards its residents in this area.

And while we are on the subject, what has happened to BCUHB's language policy? Maybe Mr Parker, the Practice Manager, who himself is English monoglot, can explain why English only letters are being sent out to fluent Welsh-speaking patients!

MISLEADING THE PEOPLE OF THE WELSH UPLANDS

1. *'...it is noted that Tywyn as a community is viewed as being more remote than Blaenau Ffestiniog. In terms of accessibility, the Welsh Index of Deprivation scores Blaenau fairly well as it benefits from a train line, bus routes and good roads. This was an important factor taken into account by the Welsh Government when approving the Tywyn Business Case and also by the Health Board in its discussions with the CHC culminating in the decision to retain the MIU in Tywyn.'*

This was one of Simon Dean's main arguments to explain why Tywyn deserves a better health service than Blaenau and the surrounding area. You are aware, I hope, that I challenged his opinion on the matter in great detail but Mr Dean disappeared quickly and abruptly from his post, without being able to justify any of his arguments.

2. BCUHB insists that Ysbyty Alltwen is within easy reach of the residents of Blaenau, even those without a car, as *a 'convenient bus service'* is available right on the Hospital's doorstep. We have done our best in the past to show that this is not true, but as this argument has not received much sympathy from the Board either, you might now give due attention to Mrs Lilian Jones' letter (see the two appendices in her name) which specify the difficulty she experienced in keeping an appointment at Alltwen.

And while we are on the subject, you must have heard in the media, over the last fortnight, about how all of Blaenau's schools had to close for the day, because the bus operators had to avoid the area because of the weather? The remainder of Gwynedd was clear of snow that day! Of course, the children of the area welcomed the unexpected holiday, but how many, I wonder, of the 5 or 6 patients from this area were at Ysbyty Alltwen at the time, and did not have any visitors at all that day? Has the Health Board considered this, I wonder? Not likely.

THE CONCERNS OF THE PEOPLE OF DOLWYDDELAN AND SOUTH CONWY

In apologising that he was unable to attend the meeting a week ago, this is what Gwyn Roberts, Dolwyddelan Community Council Clerk, had to say:-

"The system of having to phone the surgery in Blaenau at 8am to get an appointment is causing problems. Not everyone has a phone, especially older people, who do not like to use the phone or get up at that time in the morning! Getting a convenient time for an appointment that fits in with a train or bus journey for those without cars is also a problem, and an additional problem is the fact that the number of X1 buses travelling to the area have been cut... A case that should be brought to the attention of the Health Board is the example of a lady being taken ill at her home in Dolwyddelan, they sent for an ambulance - and it arrived with only one man on it - they sent for another ambulance, which also had only one man, therefore both men took the lady to Bangor in one of the ambulances and left the other ambulance near the house in Dolwyddelan. Then, both of them came back to Dolwyddelan to pick up the other ambulance. Talk about a mess and a waste of scarce resources!"

The four of you were very willing to explain that the ambulance service is not part of BCUHB's responsibility, and this is true, but the above example once again underlines how unacceptable the service provided in the Welsh Uplands is. The Health Board continues to deny the claim and ignore the problem!

INCREASE IN SERVICES

We are expected to believe that an excellent list of services await us when the Hospital is re designed. But by that time at least four years will have elapsed since we lost what we had!

One of the services that was maintained well here for many years was the *'falls prevention group'**. How ironic is it, Peter, that the report of the HIW is now criticising the Practice for failing to run such a group? And the same can also be said for a number of other services taken from us. **How deceitful is BCUHB for introducing a list of 'new services' which was already available here before the closure of the Memorial Hospital three years ago?**

We had a physiotherapy clinic here since 1945, in a building that was constructed solely for that purpose, with money that had been raised locally, much of it by soldiers returning from the Second World War and wishing to offer the money that was owed to them from the War Office. The clinic was open and very busy for five days a week over the years, until the health board decided to move

the service to the Hospital building, and to move the men's ward there to make room for it! As part of the conspiracy (yes, conspiracy, Peter!) that ward was then located in a wholly unsuitable room, next door to the women's ward, forcing all patients to use the same day room. That is the point at which Friends of the Hospital, jointly with the Defence Committee, offered to raise half the cost (£150,000) of building an extension for a brand new ward, and plans were submitted by a company of chartered architects. Can you believe that for many months there was no response at all from the Board to this offer. Only after pressing and pressing for it did we finally receive an answer and it was nothing more than an abrupt refusal to the offer, without going to any trouble to explain why. Very soon afterwards, the Board was stating its case to close the Hospital because of the wards being unsuitable and a lack of privacy for patients! Is it any wonder that the word 'deceitful' raises its head when Betsi's name is mentioned?

Incidentally, the latest news is that the physiotherapy service in Stiniog is being cut again and will only be available for one day a week from now on! Even more reason, then, to force the people of the area to go down to Alltwen for treatment (as with the x-ray service of course) in order to prove the increasing demand there and to create an argument for closing the entire unit at Blaenau. *'Services need to be developed with consideration to patient needs,'* according to HIW's recent report, *'in an area where high levels of deprivation are prevalent'* but it appears that Betsi has already decided to ignore this as well!

Why does the saying 'kicking a man when he's down' come to the mind of some of us when discussing the plans of the health board in this area?

MID WALES COLLABORATIVE

A delegation of the Defence Committee has attended every meeting of the Mid Wales Collaborative since its establishment, in the hope of being able to strengthen the case for the people of the Welsh Uplands. Can you imagine our surprise, Peter, when we heard you openly say at the meeting that *the Collaborative* will not be able to deal with problems in individual areas such as this one? I wonder how Jack Evershed and Ruth Hall will respond to this information, given that they are the joint chairs of something that is nothing more than another expensive talking shop.

I realise that a number of the above mentioned complaints are known to you already and that most of them relate to your predecessor's time in post. But it is not too late, however, for BCUHB to begin to demonstrate the same fair play in this area as it has done for the Anglicised areas on the coast.

Very Sincerely,

Geraint. (on behalf of the Defence Committee)

Dear Dr Higson,

Your response dated **21st March 2017** to my e-mail of the first of that month is again hugely disappointing, in that you yet again avoid most of the matters raised and persist in trying to defend the mistakes and the half-truths and the deceptions of past Health Board executives.

You further insist that Dr Whithead's appointment as Chair of the Blaenau Integrated Health and Social Care Project Board was *'entirely appropriate'*. Of course, that was probably the case from the Health Board's point of view, but *'appropriate'* and *'ethical'* are hardly synonymous, are they? As you well know, *'ethical'* has direct moral implications which is why we again challenge not only yourself and the Board but also Dr Whitehead himself to argue the case that it was ethical for him to oversee the closure of essential services in the Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital whilst at the same time ensuring that those very same services were safeguarded at the Dolgellau-Barmouth Hospital that serves his own Practice. And for him to claim that *'Blaenau has as good access to health services as anywhere else in Meirionnydd and has much better access to a wide range of primary care services'* is totally shameful, coming from one who is professionally in a better position than anybody to know the true facts, should he choose to face them.

However, it has become patently obvious, that you have no intention of responding directly to matters that we have raised with you time and time again, not even to the case of the elderly lady who was refused minor injuries treatment both at the Health Centre in Ffestiniog and in Alltwen Hospital, only to be treated by a compassionate off-duty district nurse at the nurse's own home. Are we to assume, therefore, that you and the BCUHB concur with Dr Whitehead's biased opinion that such a case exemplifies the *'good access to health services'* now being delivered in the Welsh Uplands and that we should be satisfied with our lot?

Finally, permit me to draw your attention to yet another example of undue hardship to elderly patients in the Welsh Uplands. It seems that BCUHB's policy now is for patients needing longer-term nursing care to find alternative arrangements in private nursing homes, as a means of alleviating the bed-blocking dilemma created by the closure of community hospitals such as our own. With assistance from Cyngor Gwynedd, we now know that pressure is being brought to bear on patients

and family members to make such arrangements. Does it, therefore, not concern the Health Board that, of the eight so-called '*well-being areas*' in Gwynedd, the Welsh Uplands is the **only** area without a single nursing home? Compare that with the number of such establishments in the more affluent anglicized areas. For instance, Porthmadog and the small town of Cricieth between them can boast at least seven! Furthermore, Bryn Blodau in Llan Ffestiniog is the only care home for the elderly throughout the Uplands and that has a permanent waiting list.

Consequently, patients from this area, having spent time in Ysbyty Gwynedd or Glan Clwyd before being moved to Alltwen, and even Bryn Beryl or Dolgellau, are eventually expected to find alternative nursing care, if not at home then more often than not in a private and costly nursing home. To my knowledge, as many as NINE elderly patients, from Blaenau and Llan Ffestiniog alone, are now permanent residents, through no choice of their own, in nursing homes in Llandudno (**38 miles distant**), Cricieth (**17m.**), Pentrefelin (**15m.**), Llanrwst (**15m.**), Porthmadog (**13m**) ... and that within the past twelve months a number of others have passed away in some of those same establishments, as also in Cartref Bryn yr Eglwys, Pentrefoelas (**18m. distant**).

The most recent death was that of an elderly lady from Tanygrisiau who was moved earlier this year from Alltwen to a nursing home **in Tywyn of all places, 42miles** from home! Her partner had no car, nor could he drive, so please consider what a day visit entailed for him – clippa bus from Tanygrisiau to Blaenau (**10 minutes**), bus ride (hourly service) from Blaenau to the Oakeley Arms in Maentwrog (c. **18 minutes**) to catch a connection (two hourly service) to Dolgellau (c. **1 hour**) and a further connection from there to Minffordd near Talylyn for yet another connection to Tywyn (c. **1½ hours**) and then an additional **10 minutes** on foot to the nursing home, totalling over **3 hours one way!** Alternatively, he could have used bus connections from Tanygrisiau to Penrhyndeudraeth (**10 + 22 minutes**) to catch a less frequent railway connection (2-hourly service) on to Tywyn (**1hr16m**), totalling **over 2 hours** one way, provided of course that convenient connections were available for outward and return journeys.

Within two months of being moved, the lady passed away with no family member at her bedside and was buried in Ffestiniog a fortnight ago. The irony and the callousness of such an example must surely be obvious to you all.

So where does the blame lie, Dr Higson? Everywhere else but ... , presumably! In the meantime the **discrimination** and the **injustice** continues against the indigenous Welsh population of the Uplands!

The Board's publication '*Health Care in North Wales is Changing*' promised '*more care closer to home*' and claimed that its aim was '*to improve health, not just extend life*'. With due respect, successive BCUHB members, together with the lead practitioner whose views you so readily condone, should today be hanging their heads in shame as far as the Welsh Uplands are concerned. But rather than do that, you will, no doubt, be reminding us yet again that we are getting a £4m new building, to house not only the few services that are left to us (see attachment), but also a very impressive Administrative Block and office accommodation overlooking the wonderful panorama that was originally intended for the benefit of inpatients of the Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital.

Yours, with increasing concern,

Geraint V Jones (on behalf of members of Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital Defence Committee)

.....

[Gohebiaeth efo Simon Dean](#) (olyndd David Purt fel Prif Weithredwr BIPBC)

28.09.2015

For the attention of Simon Dean, Interim Chief Executive Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board

Dear Simon,

I thank you for your reply to my email of August 24th but I cannot let a number of points, that are yet again being made, go unrefuted, even though they have been vehemently challenged in the past.

Can I start with two of the three so-called 'key principles' that you refer to –

i) ***Enhanced care at home***. Are you suggesting that this service really exists? Can you honestly say that it was ever properly launched, despite promises that it would be up and running before the Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital was to be closed? If so, then can you please provide me with statistics that prove its existence?

ii) ***Moving care from acute hospitals to the community ...***

If you again check your statistics you will find that Ffestiniog patients are randomly sent from Ysbyty Gwynedd to step-down hospitals at Alltwen (14m) or Bryn Beryl (26m), and occasionally to Dolgellau (23m) or even Caernarfon (31m). (Add another 6m to the

distance from Dolwyddelan). In other words, they are being sent to hospitals in localities other than their own.

And this belies the claim being made in your third paragraph, when you say *'The Health Board's aim was, and continues to be, to ensure that services in communities are based on local needs.'*

Can I now challenge the content of your fourth paragraph where you set out to disprove our claim of discrimination against the people of the Welsh-speaking Welsh Uplands:-

- Where you explain the priority given to Tywyn Hospital, you say this *'...it is noted that Tywyn as a community is viewed as being more remote than Blaenau Ffestiniog. In terms of accessibility, the Welsh Index of Deprivation scores Blaenau fairly well as it benefits from a train line, bus routes and good roads. This was an important factor taken into account by the Welsh Government when approving the Tywyn Business Case and also by the Health Board in its discussions with the CHC culminating in the decision to retain the MIU in Tywyn.'*

Since this was also Geoff Lang's explanation when we met with Dr Higson, Trevor Purt and himself 4½ months ago, then I have to assume that you are quoting from the same source.

What you are both saying, therefore, is that neither the Welsh Government nor the BCUHB know that Tywyn also has a train line and station! And that it benefits from a service that provides a direct link between Pwllheli, Birmingham and London Euston!

To be told that we have government ministers and highly paid health board officials who are prepared to take important decisions based on such ignorance is truly astounding!

On the other hand, if the WG and the Betsi **did** know of the trainline's existence, but chose an untruth to strengthen Tywyn's case for inpatient beds, MIU etc, then that is certain proof of showing favouritism and discrimination.

Your letter also claims that Tywyn has a less reliable bus service than Ffestiniog and that it has no 'good roads'. This again is highly debatable and strengthens the argument that someone or other, either in the WG or in BCUHB, chose to build a false case against Ffestiniog retaining its Memorial Hospital. If that is so, then there is certainly room for legal challenge and to seriously question the source of the information that was given to the Welsh Index of Deprivation.

There are several other points in your letter that also need to be challenged –

° ***‘Minor injury Services continue to be provided both by the GP Practice in Blaenau (similar to many other GP Practices across North Wales) and in Ysbyty Alltwen (7 days a week).’*** The truth is that ever since the rushed closure of our hospital in March 2013 the local community has been led to believe that they no longer have an option but to go down to Alltwen (14 miles) to receive treatment, from where they have been very often sent on to Ysbyty Gwynedd in Bangor to receive simple treatments such as suturing of minor wounds! And, quite frankly, for you to claim that Alltwen offers 7 days of minor injuries cover is also disingenuous.

° You then go on to imply that Ffestiniog should be grateful for a Dementia day care service once a week and a twice monthly consultant led ophthalmology clinic, and, *‘in the next few months’*, a consultant led respiratory clinic! 2½years+ after the Board voted to close the hospital, that is all you can offer us? Most of the other services on your list are also in the proposal stages and will probably not be up and running for another twelve months at least.

Compare this with one of the attachments to this letter which shows the local GP Practice’s list of services before BCUHB voted to close the hospital. The other attachment is a copy of BCUHB own document listing the services that are - or are not – available to us now, as compared to those being currently provided at Dolgellau and Tywyn hospitals. And you still maintain that there is no discrimination?

° You say that ***‘end of life care is a priority for the Blaenau community’*** and that you are exploring the scope of paying Gwynedd Council for the use of up to 5 beds in the Bryn Blodau residential care home (where there is already a long waiting list!). But will the patients taking up those beds have 24 hour nursing care! Of course not. Which begs the question: Is this BCUHB’s vision of *end of life care*?

° You base your decision to close Dolwyddelan surgery purely on a lack of response or objection from the villagers. With due respect, Simon, this is yet another disingenuous argument from a health board that has consistently disregarded or refused to respond to specific concerns and letters of complaint from the public. How can you honestly present such an argument whilst at the same time choosing to totally ignore the significant results of the two referendums held in Blaenau and Dolwyddelan in February of this year in which 99.6% of those two communities were calling for a return of inpatient beds, minor injuries cover and x-ray department?

The Primary Care Panel does, and will, have a lot to answer for!

- Your last paragraph again seeks to justify the appointment of Dr Bill Whitehead as chair of the Integrated Health & Social Care Project Board. You maintain that he was a natural choice as he is the Clinical/Locality Lead for Meirionnydd. We, however, would argue that, for that very reason, BCUHB should have foreseen a clash of interests, especially at a time when Dr Whitehead was also successfully involving himself in the struggle to retain certain services at his own Dolgellau & Barmouth Hospital!

I realize that such decisions were taken long before you took up office, and that you are in your post primarily to deal with other high-profile issues, but the Ffestiniog situation will not go away despite the fact that your predecessors have continually tried to make light of our problems.

Yours sincerely,

Geraint.

(Geraint V Jones, Chair of Ffestiniog Memorial Hospital Defence Committee)

DIM ATEB

Gohebiaeth efo Gary Doherty, Cadeirydd presennol BIPBC

16.05.2017

Dear Mr Doherty,

On behalf of Dr Walt Evans and myself, I wish to comment on our meeting with you and members of your team at your offices in Llanelwy, last Thursday (12.05.2017).

We have to keep reminding ourselves that, since 2012, you are the fifth Betsi Chief Executive with whom we have attempted to hold discussions – FIVE in as many years! - your predecessors being Mary Burrows (under whose watch the mess was created in the first place), Geoff Lang (acting chief during Mrs Burrows's prolonged absence through illness), David Purt (who had to depart his post somewhat ignominiously), Simon Dean (the Minister's choice as trouble-shooter to get the BCUHB out of special measures in a matter of 90 days and who obviously failed dismally even after an extended stay in the post), and now yourself, who is proving to be equally intransigent in the face of all arguments.

From the very beginning of our meeting, it became obvious what your intentions were. You were there to talk and not to listen to any of our arguments. You also made it quite clear that you would

be leaving within the hour, presumably because of a commitment to be elsewhere from 5.15 on. This, in itself, surprised us, especially since Mr Hamilton had been waiting over two months for you to agree to the meeting in the first place and who had travelled all the way from Caerdydd to meet with you (a round trip of over 350 miles!). But even if you yourself had adequate reason to leave, we at least expected the rest of your team – all of them highly-paid professionals – to take over from you and to respond to our concerns. Imagine our surprise, therefore, when they too got up, obviously on cue, to terminate the meeting. Hardly a professional attitude by anyone's standard.

Permit me now to comment on the meeting itself. Following a brief introductory word by Mr Hamilton you then began a prepared response to undermine our case even before we had had an opportunity to present it, thus giving the distinct impression that your intention was to take-up as much of the allotted time as possible. That left us with no option but to rudely interrupt, in order to get ourselves heard. But neither yourself nor any one of your team were there to listen, were they Mr Doherty? Quite frankly, it soon became apparent you were merely there to give Mr Hamilton and ourselves short shrift. Consider, for instance –

- (i) When we presented you with copies of a pamphlet detailing as many as EIGHTEEN cases of elder abuse in Blaenau Ffestiniog alone during the past twelve to eighteen months, not a single one of you showed enough interest to even glance at the cover.
- (ii) Similarly, when we presented each and every one of you with a copy of Professor Marcus Longley's document comparing which services now available in Dolgellau, Tywyn and Ffestiniog as a consequence of the Betsi's discriminatory actions, not a single one of you bothered to look at that, either. Why was that, I wonder, if not to make it quite clear to us, yet again, that healthcare in the Welsh Uplands comes rock-bottom of the Board's list of priorities.

And when I then raised the case of the practice doctor on duty in the Blaenau Health Centre not being able to respond to a call from the home for the elderly three miles away, simply because he was the **only one on duty and taking surgery** that morning, and that even he had had to go home ill soon afterwards, you again incredibly turned a deaf ear. In other words, your intentions were all too obvious from the very start; you had absolutely NO intention of giving consideration to our genuine concerns for the indigenous Welsh-speaking people of the Welsh Uplands. And then, when you got up to leave dead-on 5.15, you left us with the distinct impression of 'job done' as far as you

were concerned. What we hadn't expected was to see the rest of your team also get up, on cue, to leave. Was that the pre-ordained plan, Mr Doherty?

Quite frankly, you never gave us the chance to air our concerns or to challenge some of the misleading statements in your correspondence with the Petitions Committee on January 6th of this year. In Appendix 1 of that letter alone there are several statements that show quite clearly that BCUHB has gone out of its way to discriminate against the Welsh Uplands, but when Dr Evans and I tried to raise but one of those matters you conveniently side-stepped the issue. Which is why we now intend to draw out a full list of such examples (including those that have been left unanswered in the past) to present, together with a copy of this letter, not only to the Petitions Committee and the Health Minister but also to others who have a professional understanding of such matters.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Walt Evans

Geraint V. Jones