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Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol
Cwm Taf Morgannwg
University Health Board



Freedom of Information Request: Our Reference CTMUHB_60_26

You asked:

I would be grateful if you could clarify the following in relation to Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board's current practice:

1. Use of the Royal Mail NHS Barcode

Royal Mail has confirmed that an NHS-specific barcode is now available, at no additional cost, to help optimise and prioritise the delivery of NHS correspondence during periods of local or national disruption.

- **Can you confirm whether the Health Board (including its hospitals, departments and relevant services) is currently using this NHS barcode for patient appointment letters?**

The majority of patient mail is sent from CTMUHB via Whistl contract as part of an All Wales Agreement. Any mail sent via Royal Mail is processed via a QR code rather than a bar code.

- **If not, are there plans to adopt it?**

This is something that would need to be agreed via the All Wales NHS Contract. The Health Board does not hold local contracts.

2. Method of Issuing Appointments

- **What percentage of outpatient appointments are currently issued by post, compared with digital methods such as SMS, email, telephone, or the NHS App?**

All appointments unless agreed with patient on the phone are confirmed by post for core outpatients. We also use SMS notifications, telephone and more recently the NHS App.

- **Are particular patient groups more reliant on postal communication due to digital exclusion?**

Unknown - we do not hold this information. Although, we have engaged with patient stakeholders recently and always have post as the core method of communication even when digital is used.

3. Postal Class and Dispatch Times

- **What class of post is typically used for appointment letters (e.g. First Class, Second Class, or another service), and how is this determined in relation to appointment urgency?**

First Class is only used by exception for short notice urgent suspected cancer (USC) patients who we have been unable to reach by telephone, otherwise Second Class is used.

- **Can you clarify whether appointment letters are ever held for batching prior to posting, and if so, what the typical timescale is between letter generation and dispatch?**

Letters are printed daily. They are not held for batching prior to posting.

4. Missed Appointments and Postal Communication

Nationally, missed outpatient appointments remain a significant challenge for the NHS.

- **Does the Health Board hold any local data, audits, internal reviews, or even anecdotal evidence that links missed appointments to late, delayed, or failed delivery of appointment notifications by post?**

No – we do not hold this information.

- **If such data is not collected, are there reasons why this information is not monitored, and are there plans to assess whether communication method or timing contributes to missed appointments locally?**

We do not hold this information.

If a patient does miss an appointment due to a late letter, we would only be aware if the patient notifies us. Therefore, it would be difficult for us to monitor/assess. If a patient phones to inform us, then they would be rebooked, and this confirmed on the telephone with the patient.

I fully recognise that once correspondence enters the postal network, delivery performance is outside the Health Board's control. However, the method, timing, and reliability of how patients are notified of appointments, including the choice of postal service, use of available safeguards such as the NHS barcode, and dispatch practices are matters within the Health Board's control.

Given the impact that missed appointments have on patients, clinical capacity, and NHS efficiency, I would welcome your response and any reassurance you can provide regarding current practice and any planned improvements.