
South Glamorgan Community Health Council

Your feedback on Hospital Visiting in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan

June 2022



Accessible formats

This report is also available in Welsh.

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About the Community Health Councils (CHCs)

CHCs are the independent watchdog of the National Health Service (NHS) within Wales. CHCs encourage and support people to have a voice in the design and delivery of NHS services.

CHCs work with the NHS, inspection and regulatory bodies. CHCs provide an important link between those who plan and deliver NHS services, those who inspect and regulate it and those who use it.

CHCs hear from the public in many different ways. Before the coronavirus pandemic, CHCs regularly visited NHS services to hear from people while they were receiving care and treatment. CHCs also heard from people at local community events, and through community representatives and groups.

Since the coronavirus pandemic, CHCs have focused on engaging with people in different ways.

This includes surveys, apps, videoconferencing and social media to hear from people directly about their views and experiences of NHS services as well as through community groups.

There are 7 CHCs in Wales. Each one represents the “patient and public” voice in a different part of Wales.

Introduction & Background

Prior to March 2020, Hospital Visiting in Cardiff & the Vale of Glamorgan was accessible for most and allowed the patients' relatives to visit them in hospital multiple times a week. We know the benefits of seeing loved ones and how this can have a massive impact on a person's health and their recovery, especially in a place that isn't their home and surrounded by people they don't know.

In response to the initial Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020, the Cardiff & Vale University Health Board had to make drastic changes to ensure the safety of patients and their staff within their hospitals. To comply with Welsh Government guidance at the time, and to reduce footfall within the hospitals, the Health Board stopped their visiting access. Visitors were only allowed to visit if a patient was at end of life, in Labour, or the patient had further additional needs.

As a result of these restrictions to access, the CHC were also unable to undertake any physical visiting activity on the hospital wards. The CHC were understanding of the Health Boards situation at this difficult time, nevertheless we continued to receive feedback from the public about their concerns of not being able to visit their loved ones in hospital and the impact this had on both the patients and their relatives. Therefore, the CHC were keen to see hospital visiting reinstated.

In 2021, the Cardiff & Vale University Health Board reinstated their visiting system whereby patients were only allowed a one-hour visit from a nominated individual per week. Visitors were required to contact a general booking line, operated through a mobile phone that was open only three hours a day.

In March 2022, the CHC were made aware that the Health Board were undertaking a survey of their hospital visiting system and were asked to share this survey on social media also. At the time, the CHC felt the survey didn't allow respondents the opportunity to provide their views and experiences of hospital visiting appropriately. Therefore, the CHC decided to undertake its own feedback form to allow the public the opportunity to share their experiences of the new system and how they would like to see hospital visiting going forward.



What we did

The South Glamorgan CHC launched an online feedback form to gain feedback and insight from patients and the public across Cardiff & the Vale of Glamorgan, on their experiences of the hospital visiting system.

The feedback form was listed on our website and publicised through our Facebook and Twitter social media channels.

The CHC ran the feedback form between March 2022 through to the end of May 2022, and asked the following three questions;

- Have you or a friend/family experienced using the new hospital visiting system, either as a visitor or a patient? If so please tell us about your experience?
- What did you like and/or dislike about the new system in place for hospital visiting?
- How would you like to see hospital visiting going forward?

It must be noted that the CHC closed the feedback form after being informed by the Health Board that the hospital visiting system was being changed to allow two people to visit for one hour each day and can be booked through the ward itself. Whilst the CHC were pleased to see hospital visiting restrictions being relaxed, the CHC still wanted to share the findings of the feedback provided by our communities. The CHC would wish ideally to see visiting to that available pre pandemic, however, understand the cautious approach being undertaken.

Who we are hearing from

The feedback form was open to anyone to complete, regardless of whether they are the patient, a visitor, or neither. Whilst it is useful to hear from those who have directly used this new system, it is also helpful to hear from those who have not used this and their initial thoughts and feelings about using this system.

In total, the CHC received 61 feedback forms. In addition we also received over 35 social media comments that the CHC would also like to include within the findings. We can confirm the request for feedback generated the most social media discussion we have seen, indicating this to be a very key topic within our communities.

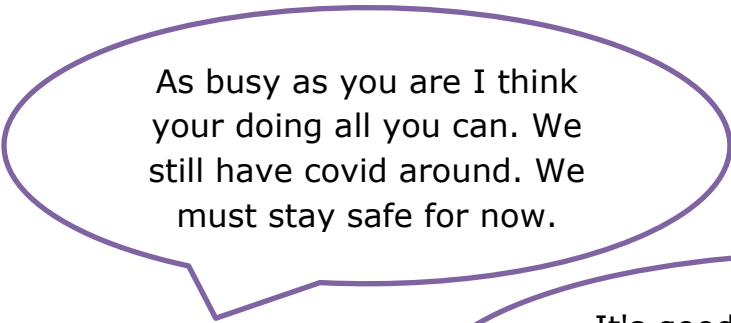


What we heard

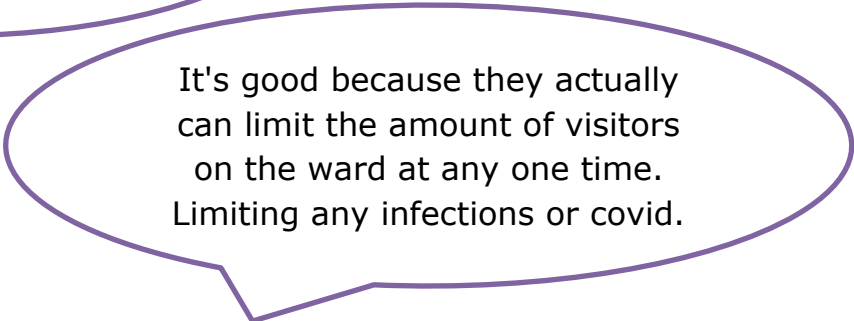
It was disappointing although not unexpected to report that the majority of responses received, both via the feedback form and social media comments, were not complementary regarding the Health Boards system of one visit per week.

Nevertheless, it is important to highlight some of the positives that were shared.

When asked about what they liked and/or disliked about the system in place, there were some positive feedback received, more so around staff and ensuring everyone is safe from covid.

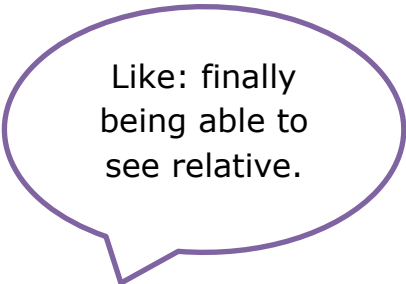


As busy as you are I think your doing all you can. We still have covid around. We must stay safe for now.

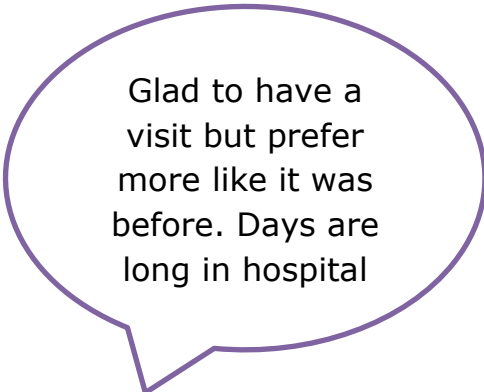


It's good because they actually can limit the amount of visitors on the ward at any one time. Limiting any infections or covid.

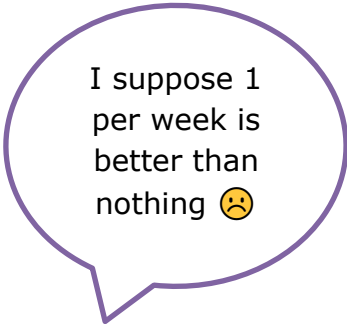
Some respondents stated they were just happy to be able to see their loved ones in hospital as it was "*better than nothing*".



Like: finally being able to see relative.

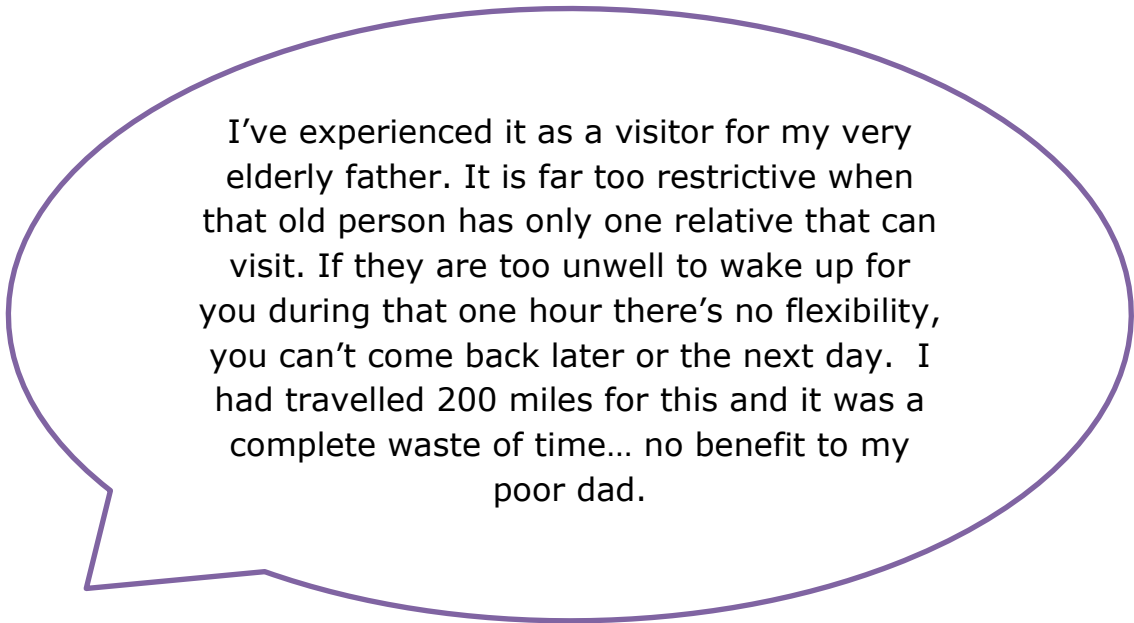


Glad to have a visit but prefer more like it was before. Days are long in hospital

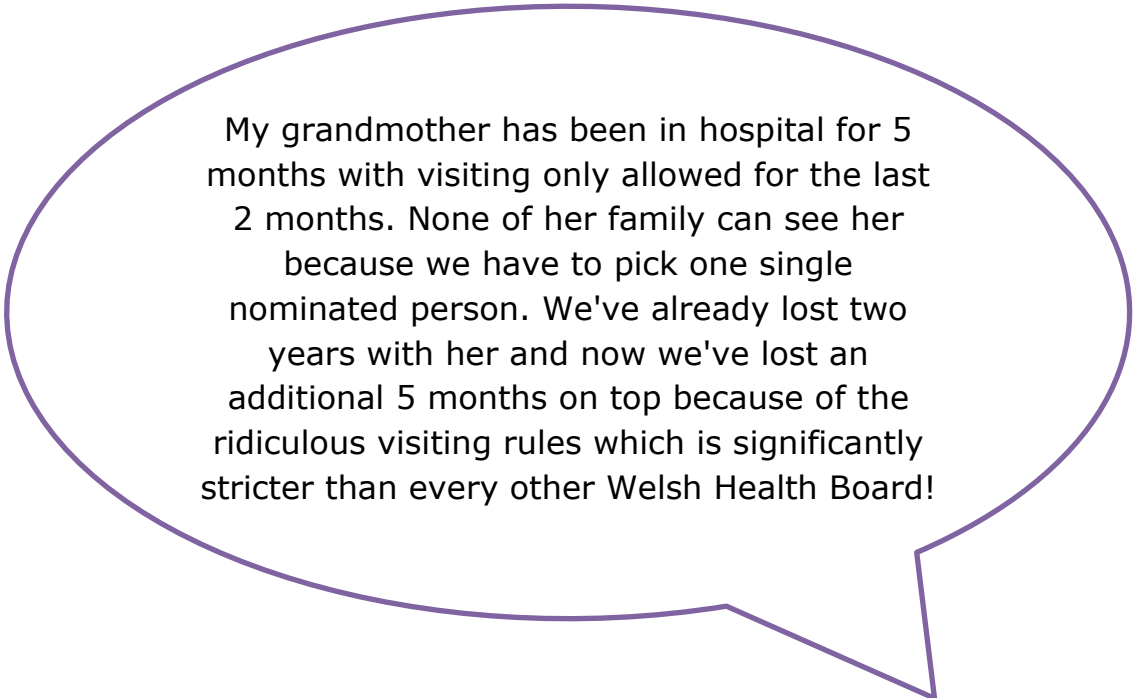


I suppose 1 per week is better than nothing 😞

Sadly, a lot of respondents made it very clear in their response there is "*Nothing to like*" about the new visiting system, and many people were willing to share some of their experiences;



I've experienced it as a visitor for my very elderly father. It is far too restrictive when that old person has only one relative that can visit. If they are too unwell to wake up for you during that one hour there's no flexibility, you can't come back later or the next day. I had travelled 200 miles for this and it was a complete waste of time... no benefit to my poor dad.

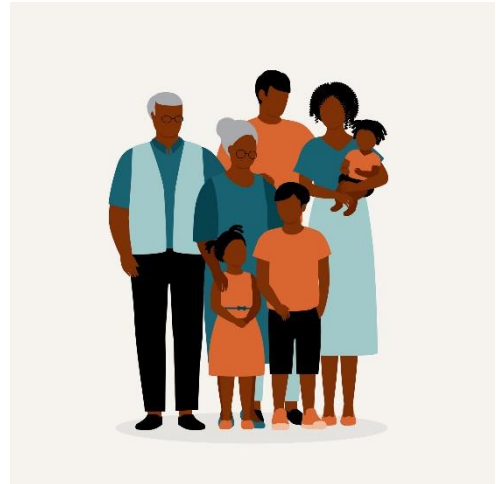


My grandmother has been in hospital for 5 months with visiting only allowed for the last 2 months. None of her family can see her because we have to pick one single nominated person. We've already lost two years with her and now we've lost an additional 5 months on top because of the ridiculous visiting rules which is significantly stricter than every other Welsh Health Board!

Experienced it as an inpatient. It was horrendous. Nobody was able to successfully book a visit during my first 4 days in hospital. I was alone and nobody could bring me essential items like fresh clothes! Eventually the nurses took pity on us and let my husband in to bring me fresh clothes and a toothbrush! Absolutely awful!

it was awful trying to decide who would get to see my dad between my mum, myself and my children. It was inhumane and my dad suffered because of it.

We are aware that some patients who are active and mobile, are able to meet visitors in public areas of the hospital for as long and as many times as they like. Whilst this is a positive circumstance for some, for those patients who cannot get out of bed or get to these public areas, this proves a lot more difficult and restricted.



Essentially any mobile patient can arrange to meet any number of family and friends in public parts of most hospitals. The restrictions thus impact mostly on people like me who are immobile.

Appointment Booking System

The CHC heard what it was like trying to book an appointment through the new central booking system, and the difficulties some people experienced, such as the timeframe an individual could call to book and the number of times trying to book an appointment.

I disliked that there was only a 3 hour window to choose from and those times were during working hours making visiting impossible for people that work 9-5!

The lines don't seem to be open on a frequent basis so it's tough getting through which causes more upset as you can't get through to the wards either. They need to take into account people who work.

Also, booking an appointment is very, very difficult via booking system. Often no answer or "fully booked" like the visit is a leisure activity. Very sad.

Lack of communication and organisation. They didn't even have the visitor list to know who had booked to visit

It was horrific. She was dying. It was never easy to arrange an appointment. Very often it was impossible to make an appointment to visit and they never rang back to arrange an appointment!, many an hour was spent trying to secure an appointment. As 1 of 5 siblings we DID NOT get the opportunity to visit my mother

Mental Health & Wellbeing

The Covid pandemic has been a testing time for everyone and one of the biggest themes to have come out of covid is Mental Health. Now more than ever there is a large awareness of Mental Health, and the need for support networks either through family and friends, or through organisations and charities.

Throughout the feedback form, and on social media, a large majority of respondents commented on the impact the visiting systems had on a person's mental health and wellbeing.



"The patient(s) are getting confused, upset and agitated, and declining at a faster rate, with this current system in place. They need more visits and more familiar faces to visit.

My mother is 93, three times she has had to attend hospital and was very distressed and anxious not having a visit from family only one visit after 7 days after being admitted. "

It's ridiculous. Being in hospital is awful at the best of times and some people, especially the elderly, NEED interaction with familiar faces for their own mental health!

My husband was in hospital for 3 months, only able to visit 4 times, as kept getting moved wards, causing him to become extremely depressed

It socially isolates people who are ill and in need of contact from people who love them. It is not necessary and makes an unpleasant time intolerable. Change it back ASAP.

Basically, this policy is cruel and unhelpful. The three weeks I have been in UHW has seen me lacking emotional support from the various people close to me. I have seen my partner of 15 years just four times and my ex-wife with whom I have a good continuing relationship just once. I have benefited from two mistakes which enabled these 5 visits. Yet 5 visits in three weeks has resulted in me feeling lonely and socially disorientated due to my condition. I do not agree with any regime that does not permit at least one visitation for up to two hours per day. Deprivation of visitor access to patients is without doubt damaging psychologically.

Many respondents went on to explain how seeing loved ones on a regular basis can help towards recovery and as noted later on in the Report, is one of the main reasons why people would like to see visiting restrictions eased.

They should return visiting back to how it was before covid. Every other restriction has been removed other than this. I think it is detrimental to patients' wellbeing and recovery. Seeing family can make a massive difference to a patient and could in some cases aid recovery and in patients who are nearing the end of their lives they deserve to have their family around them constantly.

It helps nurses because families can take care of little tasks such as unpacking clothes. Charging phones. Putting on jumpers etc.

People in hospital need their family more than they need nurses/ cleaners/ odd people dumping good and drink that they cannot reach or manage themselves. Family are far more important. It is iniquitous to restrict visiting in this way. You clearly do not understand people's values.

It should be a daily visit to allow people to be supported mentally and with providing food and helping with feeding where necessary. People need to be assured their family member is being properly cared for and with staff shortages this is not always happening.

Children & Hospital Visiting

Under the new system at the time, visitors were being told that children were not allowed to visit. This would have left many families and patients devastated, and some respondents shared their experiences with us.

Yes it was awful. Was not allowed to bring my children in to visit my husband. Wasn't told this until we arrived when a rude nurse shouted down the corridor 'no children allowed'

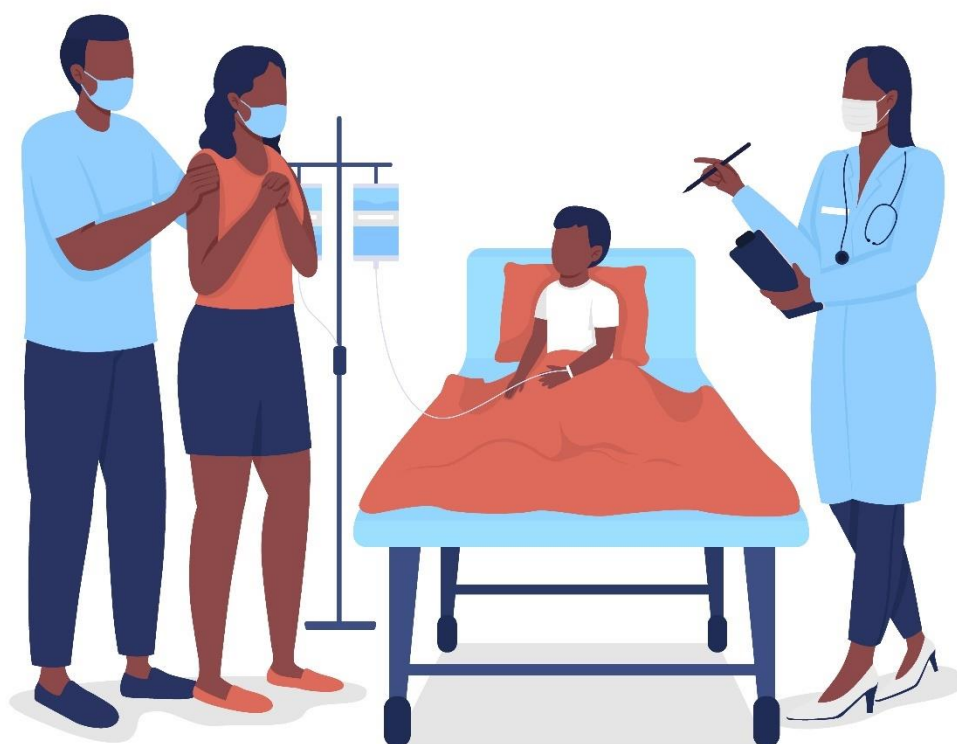
It is very inadequate and does not take into account families with young children who need to be able to visit parents who are on wards for long periods of time.



My 17yr old hasn't been able to see her nan as its only 1 person at a time.

One respondent even mentioned how they had to leave their young child alone in hospital for a period of time as they weren't allowed to stay.

My son also had 2 stays in hospital and although one parent was allowed to stay, we couldn't even swap in the ward, so we had to leave our 4 year old in a bed on the ward on his own!!



Language



Unfortunately, the CHC must acknowledge the level of frustration shown in some of the feedback received and the choice of the language used. Whilst it would not be appropriate to share all the negative language used, some of the key words used can be seen below.

Like a 'Prison'

***Soul
destroying***

Brutal, cruel

Inadequate

Inhumane

There were also some choice sentences used around how the Health Board may view visitors.

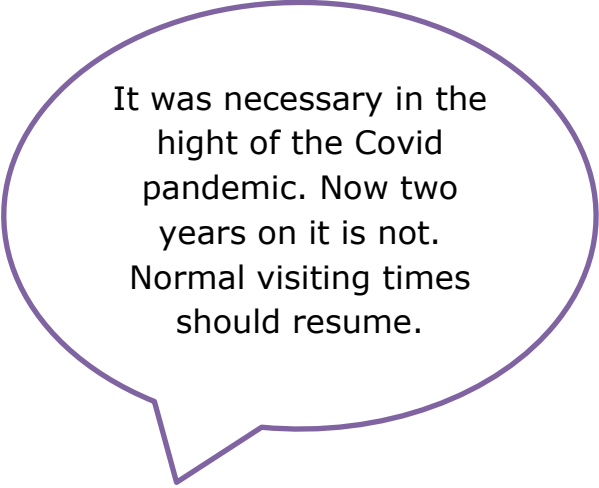
Visitors are now perceived as a pain in the neck!

Seems the staff now view visitors an inconvenience and unwanted.

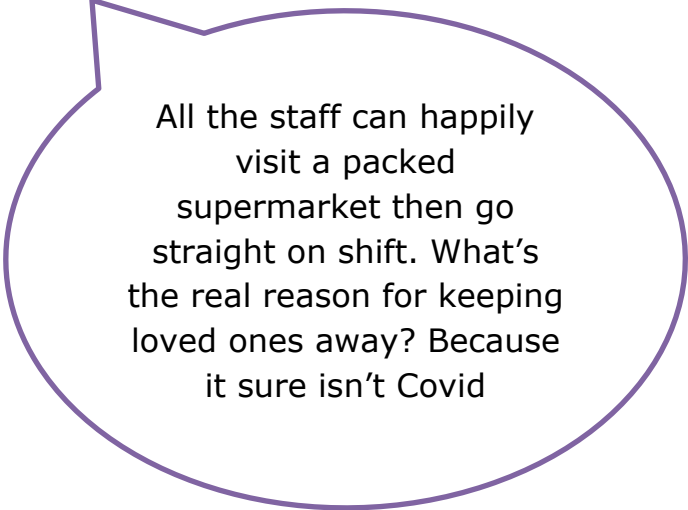
Whilst the CHC cannot condone some of the language used, this is a clear indication of the frustration with the Health Board over its decision to restrict visiting by families.

Covid Restrictions and visiting

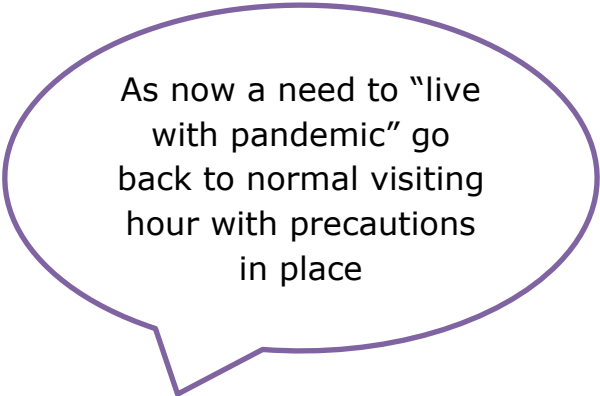
Some respondents made comments in regards to the ease of restrictions within society, yet are not being reflected within healthcare services.



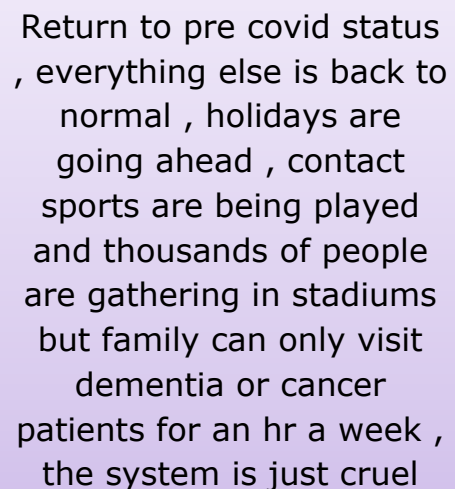
It was necessary in the hight of the Covid pandemic. Now two years on it is not. Normal visiting times should resume.



All the staff can happily visit a packed supermarket then go straight on shift. What's the real reason for keeping loved ones away? Because it sure isn't Covid



As now a need to "live with pandemic" go back to normal visiting hour with precautions in place



Return to pre covid status , everything else is back to normal , holidays are going ahead , contact sports are being played and thousands of people are gathering in stadiums but family can only visit dementia or cancer patients for an hr a week , the system is just cruel

There seems to be a general feeling that hospitals, and other healthcare settings, should open up and relax their restrictions similar to what other business have done ie shops.



Visiting going forward

The final question of the feedback form asked respondents how they would like to see hospital visiting going forward. Below is a list of some of the suggestions put forward by the public;

- *Consideration shown to patients and visitors. Better arrangements and a greater frequency of available visiting and a greater spread of times to accommodate visitors.*
- *Visiting 1 hour, twice a day, two visitors max at a time.*
- *Maternity / children open visiting*
- *Visiting twice a week at least*
- *Return of previous system*
- *Pre-Covid or 'normal' visiting hours (with additional masks and hand sanitising) should be implemented ASAP.*
- *Back to normal*
- *Needs to allow at least an extra person, and more than one visit a week.*
- *Back to unlimited visiting*
- *Stagger the visiting hours so patients can see their family daily*
- *At the discretion of ward staff or bookable with a more robust reliable system*
- *Direct bookings via the wards*
- *Staff on wards must make it know to family immediately what the system is.*
- *The telephone line needs to be manned all day, every day.*
- *Posters around the hospital and on website promoting it.*
- *As the telephone lines are never answered on a ward (except in ICU) it needs to be on a central line.*

Unsurprisingly, whilst respondents all had different variations on how they would like to see hospital visiting, (ie number of people allowed at a time and frequency), it was agreed by all respondents that patients require more than one visit per week and restrictions needed to be relaxed. Many respondents suggested that the Health Board return to 'normal' Visiting access and to make visiting much more flexible to allow family and friends to see their loved ones in hospital.



Learning from what we heard

On the whole, the responses received from our feedback form and social media have shown us that the vast majority of patients and the public were deeply unhappy with the Visiting System of just one visit per week. Unfortunately, this was evident through the tone and language used in the responses received.

Visitors were experiencing difficulties in the first instance of trying to book an appointment, mainly down to the restricted three-hour timeframe that stopped some individuals, particularly those who work, from being able to book an appointment. The restriction of only being able to nominate one person to visit was also distressing for families, whether it was having to choose who could visit, or the fact that children were not allowed onto the ward.

Of concern are the patients who are immobile and/or unable to get to the public areas of the hospital, and get the opportunity to see their friends and families on several occasions. These patients are typically the most vulnerable people in our society, and it could be argued that it is these individuals who need to see their loved ones the most.

There has been an increase in Mental Health issues as a result of the pandemic, which has now led to an increased awareness and understanding of Mental Health. Our feedback form results have showed that Mental Health is one of the key factors that were considered when providing feedback on hospital visiting, regardless of whether they had experienced it themselves, know of someone who had experienced it, or have merely acknowledged this as a concern. A large number of respondents pointed out the benefits that visiting has on an individuals'

Mental Health, which can then positively contribute to their Recovery in hospital. We are aware that being in hospital is not like being at home, and therefore having the opportunity to see people they know and love provides that familiarity that they are currently missing in hospital.

There were some positive comments received but these were generally from people who were just glad to finally have a visit as it was '*better than nothing*'.

Some respondents also argued the need for restrictions, especially when there are no other areas of society still following covid restrictions as they originally were. Nevertheless, as suggested by some respondents, patients and public would still be happy to wear the necessary PPE (masks, hand gel) in and around the hospital when visiting.

Furthermore, the CHC are also aware that hospital visiting is different between Welsh Health Boards which can therefore cause some anger and frustration amongst people in society. It is apparent that the Welsh Government Guidance can be interpreted differently, and it is then down to each Health Board to determine the process they follow.

On the whole, almost all respondents have asked for the visiting system to be changed going forward with the primary factor being able to visit people in hospital more than one day a week.

The CHC fed its initial findings to the Health Board and following this, the Cardiff & Vale University Health Board have now changed their visiting process to allow two people to visit for one hour per day. The CHC has welcomed this change as this would considerably help to improve the patient experience at hospitals currently.

Details on how to arrange a visit can be found on the next page.

How to arrange a visit

Cardiff and Vale University Health Board

Every patient can have **ONE** visit per day for **ONE** hour with a maximum of **TWO** visitors. Visits must be booked in advance with the ward.



To request a visit please call the ward directly



For the Emergency Unit and Outpatient Clinics, **PLEASE ATTEND ALONE IF POSSIBLE.**

However, if you need **ONE** person with you, staff will try to accommodate this.

Green Zones (Elective Surgery) and the Maternity Unit will have separate guidance.



For Carers, for those people helping with rehabilitation, for people with learning or mental health needs, the ward will agree an individual attendance plan with you.

For any patient receiving palliative care, an individual plan will be agreed with you.



Clinical areas have identified visiting slots to reduce footfall on hospital sites. A slot will be allocated when you call the ward.

Please do not attend if you feel unwell in any way.



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Cardiff and Vale
University Health Board

Thanks

We thank everyone who took the time to share their views and experiences with us about their health and care services and to share their ideas.

We hope the feedback people have taken time to share influences healthcare services to recognise and value what they do well – and take action where they need to as quickly as they can to make things better.

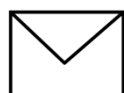
Feedback

We'd love to hear what you think about this publication, and any suggestions about how we could have improved it, so we can use this to make our future work better.

This report is available in Welsh and English.



Contact details



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If you write to us in Welsh, we will answer in Welsh. This will not lead to a delay in responding to your correspondence.

We welcome telephone calls in Welsh.

South Glamorgan Community Health Council