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**Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE**

Mark Drakeford AC / AM  
Minister for Health and Social Services  
Welsh Government  
Cathays Park  
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2 February 2015

Dear Mr Drakeford,

**WELSH RESIDENT CANCER PATIENTS TREATED IN ENGLISH HOSPITALS**

Thank you for your letter of 18 December 2014 in which you asked me to review a communication on Twitter on 5 December by the Secretary of State for Health, Jeremy Hunt, which suggested that 6,500 Welsh resident cancer patients are treated in English hospitals each year<sup>1</sup>. You noted that this same figure was quoted by the Secretary of State in the House of Commons on 25 November<sup>2</sup>. In addition you also mentioned that in an October Daily Mail article, the number of cancer patients being treated in England in 2012/13 was 15,450<sup>3</sup>.

As you note in your letter, the 6,500 figure relates to the number of hospital admissions, not patients. In 2012/13, the published official statistics report that there were 6,527 finished admission episodes (FAEs) for Welsh residents admitted to English hospitals, with a primary diagnosis of cancer. Estimates of the number of Welsh patients admitted to English hospitals can be calculated in different ways. In this instance, the FAEs relate to 2,394 Welsh residents being treated in English hospitals, representing an average of 2.7 admissions per patient<sup>4</sup>. These data were produced as a result of an ad hoc query by Department of Health analysts of the 'HES Interrogation System' (HDIS)<sup>5</sup>.

The Head of Profession for Statistics in the Department of Health has confirmed to Statistics Authority officials that the misleading reference to the number of Welsh resident patients treated for cancer in English hospitals was based on an incorrect briefing supplied to the Secretary of State's office on 20 November which included advice that: "In 2012-13, 6,527 Welsh residents were admitted to English hospitals with a primary diagnosis of cancer". I am pleased to note that the Secretary of State has now made a written correction to the parliamentary record on this issue<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>[https://twitter.com/jeremy\\_hunt/status/542264794662060032](https://twitter.com/jeremy_hunt/status/542264794662060032)

<sup>2</sup><http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmhansrd/cm141125/debtext/141125-0001.htm#14112530000004>

<sup>3</sup><http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2800815/patients-mass-exodus-england-labour-blocks-international-inquiry-crisis-hit-welsh-nhs-thousands-cross-border-life-saving-treatment.html>

<sup>4</sup> Bespoke Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) Team analysis of HES data produced by the Health and Social Care Information Centre (HSCIC)

<sup>5</sup> This system is an online system for accessing HES data rather than being supplied directly by the Health and Social Care Information Centre (HSCIC), and is not directly available to the public.

<sup>6</sup><http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmhansrd/cm150112/corrtxt/150112c0001.htm#150112200015>

Separate analysis of the number of patients admitted to English hospitals between 2003/04 and 2012/13 that Welsh commissioners were responsible for was conducted by the Health and Social Care Information Centre (HSCIC) in answer to a Written Parliamentary Question in February 2014<sup>7</sup> (see **Annex A** for more details). It seems likely that the sum of the primary diagnosis of inpatient admission episodes and outpatient attendances for 2012-13 is the source of the 15,450 figure quoted in the Daily Mail.

Finally, I would also note that, when considering the number of Welsh residents treated in English hospitals, their closest hospital may be in England; and also that the flows go both ways. For example, in 2012/13, there were 1,156 admissions of 289<sup>8</sup> English residents to Welsh hospitals with a primary diagnosis of cancer.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Health, Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP, and to the National Statistician, John Pullinger.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Dilnot". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A' and 'D'.

**Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE**

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmordbk2/140304o01.htm>

<sup>8</sup> NHS Wales Informatics Service Information and Statistics analysis of the Patient Episode Database for Wales

## Annex A

In February 2014, the Health and Social Care Information Centre (HSCIC) provided a contribution (Table 1 below) to an answer to a Written Parliamentary Question from Simon Burns MP to ask the Secretary of State for Health, how many (a) outpatient and (b) inpatient admission episodes with a (i) primary and (ii) secondary diagnosis of cancer, for which Welsh commissioners were responsible there were in England in each of the last ten years<sup>9</sup>.

The question was expressed in terms of admissions rather than patients. The HSCIC PQ contribution, (which is provided below) included a footnote clarifying that the figures provided are not a count of patients; we note however, that the footnotes are not shown in Hansard.

The sum of the primary diagnosis of inpatient admission episodes and outpatient attendances in Hansard appears to be the source of the 15,450 figure quoted by the Daily Mail.

**Table 1: HSCIC's contribution to Written Parliamentary Question (189902)**

**Count of admitted patient care finished admission episodes (FAEs)<sup>1</sup> and attended outpatient appointments<sup>2</sup> with a i) primary diagnosis<sup>3</sup> and ii) secondary diagnosis<sup>4</sup> of cancer<sup>5</sup>, where the Commissioner's Strategic Health Authority was in Wales<sup>6</sup>, for the years 2003/04 to 2012/13<sup>7,8</sup>**

Activity in English NHS Hospitals and English NHS commissioned activity in the independent sector

Year	Admitted patient care, finished admission episodes (FAEs)		Outpatients, attendances	
	Primary diagnosis	Secondary diagnosis	Primary diagnosis	Secondary diagnosis
03/04	3,471	428	398	1
04/05	4,024	541	688	3
05/06	4,561	704	785	5
06/07	4,711	733	5,823	0
07/08	4,897	830	5,559	0
08/09	5,308	832	7,128	3
09/10	5,551	1,012	7,755	8
10/11	5,552	1,169	9,011	7
11/12	5,787	1,136	9,372	3
12/13	6,071	1,299	9,379	6

Source: Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Health and Social Care Information Centre

### 1) Finished admission episodes

A finished admission episode (FAE) is the first period of inpatient care under one consultant within one healthcare provider. FAEs are counted against the year or month in which the admission episode finishes. Admissions do not represent the number of inpatients, as a person may have more than one admission within the period.

### 2) Attended outpatient appointment

Identifies if the patient attended an appointment, and if it was first or subsequent attendance, or if the appointment was cancelled or the patient did not attend.

### 3) Primary diagnosis

The primary diagnosis is the first of up to 20 (14 from 2002-03 to 2006-07 and 7 prior to 2002-03) diagnosis fields in the Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) data set and provides the main reason why the patient was admitted to hospital.

<sup>9</sup> HC Deb 05.03.2014, c873w:

[http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm140305/text/140305w0002.htm#140305w0002.htm\\_wqn81](http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm140305/text/140305w0002.htm#140305w0002.htm_wqn81)

#### **4) Secondary diagnosis**

As well as the primary diagnosis, there are up to 19 (13 from 2002-03 to 2006-07 and 6 prior to 2002-03) secondary diagnosis fields in Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) that show other diagnoses relevant to the episode of care.

#### **5) ICD10 codes used to identify cancer**

The following ICD10 codes were used to identify a diagnosis of cancer:

C00-C97 - Malignant neoplasms

#### **6) Strategic Health Authority (SHA) of Commissioner**

This indicates the SHA area in which the organisation commissioning treatment was located.

#### **7) Assessing growth through time (Inpatients)**

HES figures are available from 1989-90 onwards. Changes to the figures over time need to be interpreted in the context of improvements in data quality and coverage (particularly in earlier years), improvements in coverage of independent sector activity (particularly from 2006-07) and changes in NHS practice. For example, changes in activity may be due to changes in the provision of care.

#### **8) Assessing growth through time (Outpatients)**

HES figures are available from 2003-04 onwards. Changes to the figures over time need to be interpreted in the context of improvements in data quality and coverage (particularly in earlier years), improvements in coverage of independent sector activity (particularly from 2006-07) and changes in NHS practice. For example, changes in activity may be due to changes in the provision of care.