New approach to surveys in Wales: consultation on topics

Dear Chris McGowan

I am writing on behalf of BMA Cymru Wales in response to the above Welsh Government consultation.

The British Medical Association represents doctors from all branches of medicine all over the UK; and has a total membership of over 150,000 including more than 3,000 members overseas and over 19,000 medical student members. The BMA is the largest voluntary professional association of doctors in the UK, which speaks for doctors at home and abroad. It is also an independent trade union. BMA Cymru Wales represents over 7,000 members in Wales from every branch of the medical profession.

We do not seek, as part of this response, to provide a detailed view outlining which topics should or should not be included in the survey going forward. Given that BMA Cymru Wales represents doctors from across all branches of practice in Wales, operating across the full range of medical specialties, different members will therefore have different perspectives. As such, we are understandably not able to put forward a uniform view on behalf of our membership regarding which questions are of specific importance to the work they undertake. Our views, in general terms, can however be seen in our response to the previous Welsh Government consultation entitled ‘Future Content and Approach to Data Collection for the Welsh Health Survey’.1

In relation to the current consultation, we would nonetheless wish to express significant concern regarding the manner in which it is proposed the new survey will be conducted. We would, in fact, seriously question how practical it is to amalgamate so many detailed surveys into one.

1 http://bmaopac.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/exlibris/aleph/a21_1/apache_media/7ASYPUIGY4J22TPBXBY39NGINZUNB.pdf
The consultation document makes clear that the new survey will be carried out through face-to-face interviews with a random sample of 12,000 people across Wales each year. Our concern is that should the Welsh Health Survey be amalgamated with the National Survey for Wales, the Arts in Wales Survey, the Welsh Outdoor Recreation Survey and, possibly also, the Active Adults Survey, then the new survey will prove to be too unwieldy in size. As such, the proposed face-to-face interviews might prove to be unmanageable owing to the number of questions that will need to be asked of each individual who takes part. This, in turn, is likely to impact on the willingness of members of the public to participate in the survey in the first place.

If this problem was addressed by substantially cutting back the number of questions asked in each section of the survey, then we would be equally concerned that much of the substantial value that is derived from the current Welsh Health Survey would be lost. This would impact significantly on the ability of the NHS in Wales to plan the effective provision of health services tailored to meet the needs of the population. This could, in turn, be a false economy given that it may prove more costly in the long run as additional expenditure might then need to be incurred in order to counter such inadequate planning of service provision.

Yours sincerely,

Rodney Berman
Senior Policy Executive