

Welsh Politicians Demand Probe into GP Contract Controversy

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Concerns over the management of several GP surgeries in Wales have prompted politicians to call for an independent investigation into the relationship between Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and the GP management company, eHarley Street.

Most of the GP practices previously managed by eHarley Street, a partnership based in Leicestershire, have been returned to the health board amid ongoing concerns relating to

patient safety, staffing levels, and access to treatment. However, eHarley Street continues to manage three surgeries within the Aneurin Bevan area: Pontypool Medical Centre, Gelligaer Surgery near Ystrad Mynach, and Lliswerry Medical Practice in Newport.

Labour ministers and local representatives Lynne Neagle, Member of the Senedd (MS) for Torfaen, and Nick Thomas-Symonds, Member of Parliament (MP) for Torfaen and Minister for EU Relations at the UK government, have raised ongoing complaints about Pontypool Medical Centre, which serves approximately 17,000 patients.

The health board has responded by stating that enhanced monitoring of the surgeries has “not identified any contractual breaches or safety concerns”. Nevertheless, public unease remains, with calls for a formal inquiry stretching back over a year.

Last year, BBC Wales reported patient complaints concerning difficulties accessing appointments and treatments at GP surgeries under eHarley Street management. Some patients, including those with terminal illnesses, described significant challenges in obtaining timely care.

In total, eHarley Street had overseen nine Welsh practices, eight of which were within the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board’s remit. Since concerns emerged, five surgeries have been handed back to the health board, with only three currently remaining under Harley Street’s management.

Ms Neagle and Mr Thomas-Symonds jointly wrote to the public spending watchdog, Audit Wales, expressing dissatisfaction with the responses received from the health board after ten meetings. They claim the board’s assurances have not “provided constituents with the level of reassurance they need”.

Their letter calls for the Auditor General to examine the health board’s decision to engage eHarley Street and its subsequent management of the contracts. The politicians emphasised that their concerns are not directed at the staff working at the surgeries, acknowledging their dedication under challenging conditions.

In response, eHarley Street criticised the politicians for escalating the issue publicly, suggesting it was being politicised in the context of a pre-election year in Wales. The GP partnership cited “chronic underfunding, outdated funding formulas and a burnt-out

workforce” as contributing factors to operational difficulties. They also stated they had injected “personal and private funds to stabilise operations and recruit clinical staff”.

The company welcomed Audit Wales’ involvement but suggested that the criticism may be partly motivated by their status as an English-led provider operating in Wales.

Ms Neagle and Mr Thomas-Symonds defended their actions, stating they must represent their constituents and stand by their call for transparency and accountability.

The health board confirmed it continues to work closely with eHarley Street through enhanced monitoring to ensure contractual compliance and the delivery of accessible primary care services. It reiterated that no contractual breaches or safety issues have been identified to date.

Audit Wales said it is currently gathering information to understand how the health board is addressing the concerns raised. Once this initial work is complete, the Auditor General will decide if further investigation is required.

Both politicians welcomed Audit Wales’ approach and look forward to updates on the next steps from Auditor General Adrian Crompton.

The Welsh Government acknowledged awareness of concerns regarding Pontypool Medical Practice but stated that the health board is responsible for managing contractual compliance and providing necessary support to the practice.

This ongoing dispute highlights the challenges faced by healthcare providers and commissioners in Wales as they strive to maintain standards of care amid funding pressures and workforce shortages. The outcome of Audit Wales’ review will be closely watched by patients, politicians, and health professionals alike.