

Research and innovation in health and care: learning from the pandemic

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The story so far: research and evidence in the pandemic

- From the outset – a huge, international effort to bring research to bear on key issues – controlling the pandemic, treating COVID, prevention and vaccines
- Research effort in UK led by UK Research and Innovation, and National Institute for Health Research (in England, with DA partners)
- We are genuinely world leading in research – therapeutics, genomics, vaccines...
- A thousand flowers bloom – UKRI has commissioned 500+ projects
- Response from GO Science – national core studies in seven key areas aimed at being much more closely coupled to policy needs
- Welsh Government and NHS involvement – closely tracked, involved and contributing – strong performance

The story so far: COVID research in Wales

- Strong engagement and performance in some areas – standout examples would be SAIL/data analytics, and variant genomics
- Challenges of getting Welsh/DA voice heard at a UK level, but improved collaboration across HCRW/NIHR/CSO/RDDNI
- Great involvement in research management and delivery – UPH group, trials setup/recruitment, vaccines task force, etc
- Pretty mixed results of Welsh research community involvement in leading research studies in UKRI portfolio – and worth reflecting on the reasons for this
- Profile of health and care research and its value/impact with Welsh Government/NHS boards/other agencies

What have we learned? Some key points

- Research matters like never before: central to policy and practice in the pandemic
- From no evidence to too much evidence? Challenges of staying up to date with exponentially expanding field
- Research needs to move at the pace of the pandemic if it is to be useful – old models not fit for purpose
- Increasing need for rapid evidence synthesis and knowledge mobilisation
- Need to localise and contextualise research and evidence to Wales – distinctive issues and priorities

The Wales COVID19 evidence centre

- A £3m 24 month initiative to provide a flexible evidence and research capability which can work closely with Welsh Government officials and leaders in the NHS in Wales to bring evidence to bear on decision making effectively
- Director (Adrian Edwards) and core team, plus collaboration partners providing capacity and capability in key areas
- Evidence synthesis, knowledge mobilisation and rapid research and evaluation
- Key issues
 - Using research and evidence in managing the pandemic
 - The impact of the pandemic on the health of communities and people in Wales
 - The impact of the pandemic on the health and care delivery systems in Wales

The COVID19 pandemic legacy: some thoughts

- Increased visibility and value placed on health and care research – and whether that is or can be sustained
- Closer alignment of the research agenda with the needs of the NHS and the care system – really “needs led, science added”?
- A more managed research enterprise/landscape – balancing investigator autonomy, funder priorities, delivery capacity and prioritisation of need
- New models/methods for research – the age of the platform trial, digital recruitment/delivery, wider use of routine data, etc
- A rethinking of research ethics and research/information governance and the balance of risks and benefits