



Janet Finch-Saunders MS|AS

Aelod Senedd Cymru dros Aberconwy
Member of the Welsh Parliament for Aberconwy



Dr Peter Saul,
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Via Email.

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Dear Dr Peter Saul,

I hope that this letter finds you and the RCGP Council well. I am writing during the annual Mental Health Awareness Week, as organised by the Mental Health Foundation, to make clear my sincere wish to work in collaboration with your organisation to ensure that access to mental health support is made easier, both across Aberconwy and Wales as a whole.

The impact of the pandemic on our physical and mental health cannot be understated and the scale of this long-term issue is alarming. As you will be aware, statistics have revealed that more than 3.2 million antidepressant items were prescribed by GPs in Wales in the six months after the Covid pandemic started, which is an increase of 115,660 compared to the previous year. In the same period, the number of people referred for talking therapies also fell by a third to 25,520. As Mind Cymru has rightfully cautioned, we cannot become a nation that too often uses antidepressants as a sticking plaster so as to alleviate distress in the short term.

In the recent election, the Welsh Conservatives made a clear commitment to transform our nation's mental health by treating it with the same priority as physical health. To achieve this, we proposed a fundamental review of services, which would consider the experiences of service users, families, professionals and the charity sector. Separately, I also heralded your own proposal to support the provision of a dedicated mental health worker at each GP practice across Wales.

As your organisation has rightly concluded, such a local provision would ensure that patients are provided with access to a balanced mental health discussion which would allow for a review into what support they wanted and what assistance is available, helping to bring an end to the worrying trend of turning only to medication. For this reason, I would like to work in collaboration with the RCGP to push forward the necessary questions, and perhaps even a future legislative proposal, to see this idea fully realised by officials in Cardiff Bay.

It is my firm belief that a new approach to support patients on a local level must be realised if the Welsh Government is to confront what will be the lasting legacy of this pandemic. I look forward to receiving your reply in due course. In the meantime, I extend my warmest wishes for the health and well-being of you and your loved ones.

Yours sincerely,

Janet Finch-Saunders MS/AS