

Nesta Lloyd-Jones, Assistant Director, Welsh NHS Confederation

NESTA LLOYD-JONES has over 10 years' experience working in policy and public affairs in Wales and is currently the Assistant Director of the Welsh NHS Confederation (WNHSC). After completing her law degree and being called to the Bar in 2004, Nesta worked at Welsh Women's Aid and then Macmillan Cancer Support. Since April 2014, Nesta has been working for the WNHSC responsible for policy, public affairs, research, media relations and effective political liaison on behalf of WNHSC Members, the seven Local Health Boards, three NHS Trusts and Health Education and Improvement Wales. Nesta was a founding Trustee of Surviving Economic Abuse and has also been a Trustee of the End Violence Against Women Coalition, Chair of Public Affairs Cymru and has volunteered for her local Citizens Advice Bureau and BAWSO (Black Association of Women Step Out).

'How the arts are supporting health and wellbeing in Wales.'

I should like to give you a brief overview of how the NHS has been working closely with artists across Wales to support people's health and wellbeing. The Welsh NHS Confederation is the membership body that represents all the NHS organisations that make up the NHS in Wales. There are seven local Health Boards, three NHS Trusts (Welsh Ambulance Services, Velindre University, Public Health Wales) and two Special Health Authorities, Health Education and Improvement Wales and Digital Health and Care Wales. This means we work very closely with the chairs, chief executives, and other leaders across the NHS to ensure that there is a clear and consistent voice for the NHS in Wales.

We are uniquely placed to work at a national level with our members and partners, to help them address the current challenges and shape the future health and care system. We communicate with a range of stakeholders, from politicians to the public, to drive for better health and care support for population wellbeing.

Arts and health projects have been taking place in Wales for more than three decades. Over recent years, Wales has led the way in developing arts and health initiatives which enhance the lives of the most vulnerable in our society. Keeping people healthy, and in their community for longer. There has been significant work happening at an individual Health Board or NHS Trust level, with a number of positive examples of collaboration between the NHS and artists. This led to us developing and signing the first Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Arts Council Wales in September 2017. It aimed to establish a more integrated approach to arts and health, and both organisations share the same core objective to improve patient outcomes and promote general health and wellbeing.

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There is a growing understanding of the positive impact taking part in arts can have on health and wellbeing. Access to the arts, and participation in the arts can dramatically improve the health outcome and wellbeing, counter inequalities, and increase social engagement. For example, singing improves breathing, circulation, muscle tension, pain tolerance and posture. Painting and drawing, both being creative yourself or looking at the arts can enhance one's mood and emotion. Engagement with creative activities have the potential to contribute towards reducing stress, depression, and can serve as a vehicle for alleviating the burden of chronic disease. Dance is both an art form, and widely accessible form of exercise, the benefits are both physical and mental. It is a way to ensure regular movement, and is a way to directly express ideas, as well as our emotions through movement.

The arts and being creative is key to people's mental health because it is a way of self-expression, a way of channelling negative energy into something positive, or an opportunity to learn something new, for example learning to draw, or playing a musical instrument; and it can help us build confidence. It is a way of connecting with other people, and it is therapeutic. There is widespread use of using creativity as a therapy, for example, arts and music therapy.

Through the MOU, between ourselves and the Arts Council of Wales, we have an opportunity to further promote and raise awareness of the benefits of the arts, and how being creative can improve mental health and wellbeing.



This infographic highlights just some of ways we have been working with the Arts Council Wales over the last three years: through raising awareness of the arts and health coordinators, backing innovation through new ways of working to improve people's health and wellbeing, sharing information and good practice about what works, and working closely with politicians and stakeholders to raise awareness around the benefits arts can have on health and wellbeing.

Since the MOU was signed, we have published three papers on a variety of themes, ranging from how the arts can help improve mental health, to supporting communities during the COVID19 pandemic, *How the Arts are Continuing to Support the Welsh Health and Social Care Response to*

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COVID19 (2020). It is an opportunity to raise awareness of good practice. We have collaborated with the Wales Arts, Health and Wellbeing Network. We have worked to grow capacity in the sector through supporting training, best practice, peer-to-peer learning, and the development of robust peer-reviewed case studies. We have also supported a national network of arts and health co-ordinators in Wales's seven health boards, to develop partnerships across the arts and health sector, and to identify the opportunities within the NHS for creativity, to help address the health priorities and challenges that we face.

Through the Health, Arts, Research People programme, we are working with Y Lab, a partnership between Cardiff University and Nesta, to enable artists and help healthcare professionals to experiment and devise, scale and sustain new ways of improving people's health and wellbeing. We have raised awareness of all the work that we have been doing over the last three years with politicians - how the arts can work very closely with health and highlighting the benefits to wellbeing - through the Senedd's Cross-Party Group on Arts and Health, developing briefings for a range of debates, to highlight and raise awareness of the impact the arts can have on health and wellbeing.

We have used social media, podcasts and a clear press campaign to raise public awareness about the health and wellbeing benefits of the arts, and work very closely with local artists across Wales, during this public awareness campaign. Whilst so much has been achieved over the past three years, there is much still to be achieved. The second MOU was signed with the Arts Council of Wales in October last year and provides clear priorities over the coming three years.

It specifically references the benefits that the arts can bring to people's health, both their physical and mental health, and wellbeing. Including the mental health and wellbeing of artists and the NHS Wales workforce, which is a key priority at the moment, which we are still responding to the pandemic. An online platform is currently being developed to support NHS staff wellbeing, through being creative. There is an increased emphasis to raise awareness of the work of the arts and health coordinators within the health boards and considering other opportunities to work with NHS Trusts and wider public bodies. We will be commissioning research this year to assess the impact the roles have had on patients and to NHS staff.

The outbreak of COVID could have undone the progress we made over the years, but the NHS and artists have come together across Wales to make sure we do not lose this momentum. COVID has meant we have all had to make sacrifices, reducing important social interactions and significantly altering our daily lives. It would have been easy to look at

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COVID as a barrier to providing services. Instead, arts and health initiatives have risen to this challenge.

Across Wales, through using technology and innovative practices, we have potentially opened these fantastic arts initiatives up to a greater many more people, who otherwise might not have had the opportunity to realise the benefits that the arts can have on people's health, especially on mental health. The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (2015) provides the legislative framework to prioritise early intervention, prevention and considering the long term. As a result of the act, public bodies in Wales need to consider the long-term impact of their decisions. Since the Act was introduced in 2015, NHS organisations in Wales have been working to deliver innovative care models which help to create long-lasting and positive change to the current and future generations.

As the body representing NHS leaders in Wales, the Welsh NHS Confederation continued to be committed to raising awareness of the significant benefits the arts can bring, and the impact being creative can have on people's health and wellbeing. We look forward to working with the Arts Council of Wales, arts and health coordinators, artists, and key partners in the future.

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