



Ein cyf/Our ref VG/05540/19

David John Rowlands AM
Chair
Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
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6 March 2019

Dear David,

Thank you for your letter of 14 February regarding Petition P-05-870 Let's Get Every Young Heart Screened (Age 10-35) to roll out a heart screening programme to people between the ages of 10 and 35 in Wales.

Population screening programmes generally can save lives through early risk identification but can also do harm by identifying risk factors that would never otherwise develop into a serious condition or complication. Screening programmes may have false negative results, so do not guarantee protection. Receiving a low risk result does not prevent the person from developing the condition at a later date. Population screening programmes should only be offered where there is robust, high-quality evidence that screening will do more good than harm.

The UK National Screening Committee (UKNSC) advises Ministers in the four UK countries about all aspects of population screening. It brings academic rigour and authority to what is an extremely complex area and is a world leader in its field. Screening to prevent Sudden Cardiac Death (SCD) in 12 to 39 year olds has been considered by the UKNSC and is not recommended.

The UKNSC concluded the harms of screening for SCD currently outweigh the benefits. There are uncertainties about the overall benefits of identifying people with risk factors, current tests are not reliable enough (many people would be missed and provided with false reassurance, and many would be given false positive results) and there is currently no agreed treatment for someone who has been identified at risk. If a person is incorrectly identified as being at risk, they may become anxious about their physical activity and stop exercising regularly, which could have a negative effect on their overall health. The evidence has been comprehensively reviewed and below is a link to the UKNSC review and recommendation:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/screening-for-risk-of-sudden-cardiac-death-not-recommended>

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

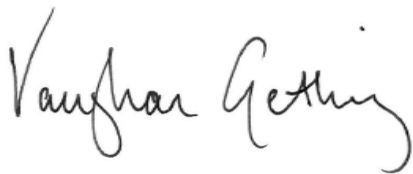
The UK NSC keeps all its policy positions under regular review. The Welsh Government will continue to monitor developments in this area of public health. If further evidence suggests screening is beneficial it will be given the appropriate consideration.

I fully support the need to address preventable causes of SCD; however, here too there is a balance to strike in the provision of health information to the public to ensure proportionality and accessibility in the messages being provided, without creating unnecessary anxiety. At a population level, it is beneficial for young people not to be discouraged from cardiovascular exercise – the benefits of which are well established.

Although whole-population screening is not beneficial, families of individuals with SCD should be offered individual clinical assessments to assess their risk. This is 'cascade' case-finding in a higher-risk population rather than whole-population asymptomatic screening. Additionally, young people who have symptoms or concerns, particularly if they are very physically active, should speak to their GP who will be able to advise them as appropriate.

The Welsh Government supports a range of NHS national screening programmes across Wales. For these programmes the NHS offers a complete service, not just a test – making sure people understand why they have been offered screening, what the outcomes might be, if there are any downsides and what their options are for each outcome. Most importantly we make sure that any care or treatment people may need is in place.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vaughan Gething". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Vaughan Gething AC/AM

Y Gweinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Minister for Health and Social Services