



Ein cyf/Our ref VG/06323/19

Janet Finch-Saunders AM
Chair - Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
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16 May 2019

Dear Janet,

Thank you for your further letter of 18 April regarding Petition P-05-870 about introducing a heart screening programme for all 10 to 35 year olds in Wales.

As I said in my previous response, 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. Screening to prevent Sudden Cardiac Death (SCD) in 12 to 39 year olds has been considered by the UK National Screening Committee and for these reasons is not recommended and, therefore, cardiac screening is not provided in the UK.

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. This approach is supported by the British Heart Foundation which supports individuals having an increased understanding of their family's medical history, so if a family member has died suddenly, particularly at a young age, they would be advised to discuss with their GP, with a view of getting themselves screened and assessed at an inherited heart conditions service, as appropriate.

The British Heart Foundation supports cascade testing of individuals who have a first degree relative who has died suddenly and no cause of death has been established (and post mortem reveals a structurally normal heart) or who has been diagnosed with an inherited heart condition.

It would be irresponsible to provide a screening programme against the advice of the experts and which the evidence does not support. The current tests available have limitations and as such it is potentially dangerous to provide individuals with misleading test results. Should more accurate tests become available, whole population asymptomatic cardiac screening will be fully considered.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vaughan Gething". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping 'V' and a long, trailing 'g'.

Vaughan Gething AC/AM

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