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Dear Carolyn,

Thank you for your e-mail of 7 April concerning elective surgery backlogs and S2 certificates.

Tackling the backlog of patients that has built up due to the pandemic is a key priority for the Welsh Government and a Programme for Government commitment. This has been supported by an additional investment of nearly £250 million last financial year and all health boards received a share of the funding and have used it to increase capacity in planned care.

All patients should be seen in order of clinical priority, which is a decision for the relevant consultant to make, based on Royal College guidelines.

As you are aware, health board activity levels continue to be affected by staff sickness, infection prevention and control, social distancing controls, and unscheduled care pressures on beds and staff. Health boards are facing a significant challenge and we must recognise the process of recovery and reset for planned care will not be easy and will take time. The Welsh Government has allocated £170 million recurrently to the NHS from the start of this financial year specifically for planned care to support the delivery of the Planned Care Recovering Plan.

In relation to S2 certificates, UK residents can apply for these to access planned state healthcare in the EU and Switzerland. The application must be made and approved by the patient's Local Health Board (LHB) in Wales in advance of any treatment being received for NHS funding to be provided and is subject to qualifying criteria

This includes:

- You must be ordinarily resident in Wales.
- Treatment “Provider” must be in the EU or Switzerland (but does not include Northern Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales). The EU countries are; Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Republic of Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden. Note this scheme does not necessarily cover planned treatment in Norway, Liechtenstein or Iceland. The individual should contact their LHB before they apply.
- The treatment provider may be either private or state providers. The treatment must however be available under the providing county’s state healthcare scheme (i.e. could be provided by a private or state provider, but it must be available within the state healthcare system).
- Applications must be authorised before treatment is received.
- The NHS must confirm that it cannot provide the treatments or equivalent, in a medically accepted timeframe for the patient’s condition / diagnosis (referred to as Undue Delay).
- There must be written support from a UK, EU or Switzerland clinician which, following their full medical assessment, supports the diagnosis, treatment and medical timeframe necessary for the treatment that the patient is seeking funding for.
- There must be written support from an EU or Switzerland clinician / provider of the planned treatment dates and estimated costs.
- The patient / applicant must check with the EU or Switzerland provider that they will accept an S2 form to fund the treatment(s).
- S2s cannot be considered for the clinical trial or experimental part of any treatment package.
- The patient does not pay for eligible treatment costs (apart from any required co-payment cost which would be charged to a person insured within that system, which the patient must pay).
- S2s cannot be issued / approved if any of the treatment costs have already been paid for (unless the payment relates to the co-payment charge).

In the case of Switzerland, the bilateral arrangement that the UK has with Switzerland applies only to UK nationals, Swiss nationals, EU citizens, refugees and stateless persons and dependants of those who fall under those categories regardless of the dependents’ nationality.

With regard to undue delay, the NHS in Wales must confirm that it cannot provide the treatment or equivalent, in a medically accepted timeframe for the patient’s condition and /or diagnosis. NHS Wales will contact the service providers to confirm treatment timeframes and whether undue delay applies. Judgement on whether there is undue delay must be based on a clinical assessment of what is a medically accepted period for the individual circumstances of the patient. This assessment needs to be kept under review whilst the patient is awaiting their treatment.

If applications under the S2 route is approved the individual will be issued with an S2 guarantee form, which they will need to present to the relevant healthcare provider abroad. Their treatment will be provided under the same conditions of care and payment that would apply to residents of the country they will be treated in. This could mean that they will have to pay a percentage of the costs personally, which is known as a co-payment charge. They may be able to claim back some or all of this contribution when they return to the UK. Please note that travel and accommodation costs incurred in accessing the treatment are not reimbursed under the S2 route.

I suggest that your constituents contact the LHB responsible for healthcare in North Wales, which is Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, to find out more about the S2 planned treatment process and to make an application – patient enquiries should be directed to the relevant LHB's Overseas Visitors Team.

The contact details for S2 applications at Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board are as follows:

Individual Patients Funding Request Team

Tel: 01745 448788 ext.7930

Email: BCU.IPFR@wales.nhs.uk

You constituents should be aware that if treatment is not approved for funding under the S2 route and they decide to proceed with treatment, this would be private treatment outside of the NHS and they would need to fund all costs themselves.

I hope this information is helpful to you and your constituents.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. E. Morgan'.

Eluned Morgan AS/MS

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