

Welsh Affairs Committee consultation – Cross-border healthcare arrangements: Royal College of Pathologists response

About the Royal College of Pathologists

The Royal College of Pathologists is a professional membership organisation with charitable status concerned with all matters relating to the science and practice of pathology. The College is a charity with over 13,000 members worldwide. The majority of members are doctors and scientists working in hospitals and universities in the UK.

The College oversees the training of pathologists and scientists working in 17 different specialties, which include cellular pathology, haematology, clinical biochemistry and medical microbiology. Although some pathologists work in laboratories, many work directly with patients in hospitals and the community. Together, they are involved in the majority of all diagnoses and play an important role in disease prevention, treatment, and monitoring.

Our work in Wales is overseen by our [Wales Regional Council](#). Council members provide professional leadership in Wales and contribute at a national level to the maintenance and development of pathology services and the quality of care that patients receive. Members create influential linkages with the local stakeholders to ensure that the College has a valued voice about what is happening in Wales.

Consultation response

Question 2 - How can the use of data and digitalisation improve the experience of patients using cross-border healthcare and the

information available to clinicians? What changes need to be made to ensure cross-border compatibility?

1. The members of the Royal College of Pathologists (RCPATH) say that it is imperative to ensure cross-border compatibility between digital systems to improve patient experience for those using cross-border health care.
2. Currently, there is no existing cross border interoperability between digital pathology systems in the two nations, or even between some health boards in Wales.
3. Establishing interoperability between digital pathology systems in Wales and networked systems in England could facilitate timely access to second opinions for complex cases, ensuring faster and more streamlined patient care for those living near the English/Welsh border. This, in turn, would enhance the quality of service by enabling more efficient and timely reporting of diagnostic test results.
4. For example, the upgrade to an [all-Wales Laboratory Information Management systems \(LIMS\)](#) is a step in the right direction to ensuring interoperability. Future business cases for digital health systems, including digital pathology systems, should be operable across all health boards in Wales, but also in relevant English health systems that operate at the Welsh border. This could be achieved by agreeing and setting out [relevant interoperability standards](#) between systems. This would ensure better patient experience and outcomes, regardless of which side of the border they live on.

Question 7 - What is the experience of patients in England and Wales who are reliant on the use of healthcare services on the other side of the border?

5. We have heard concerns from RCPATH members that there is a potential inequality for Welsh patients, in terms of a two-tier service in the turnaround times for diagnostic test reporting, and therefore how quickly patients can begin treatment.
6. Diagnostic tests are required for a vast number of conditions, including, but not limited to cancers, genetic and rare conditions and viral and microbiological infections.
7. Some Welsh patients living near the border with England may have certain diagnostic tests sent to pathology services run by English health boards, which may

have faster turnaround times for results than Welsh health boards, for example immunohistochemistry (IHC) and molecular tests.

8. The quicker that patients' test results are analysed and reported, the sooner they can get the treatment that they might need. This means that Welsh patients whose diagnostic results are processed and analysed more quickly in England could potentially have better health outcomes than those whose results are processed in Wales. This two-tier system of diagnostic outcomes is concerning and demonstrates clear cross-border differences for Welsh patients who interact with either English or Welsh pathology services.