

Mark Drakeford AC / AM
Y Gweinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Minister for Health and Social Services



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref MB/MD/5586/14

Sir Andrew Dilnot
UK Statistics Authority
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December 18, 2014

Dear Sir Andrew.

I am writing to draw your attention to the ongoing use of misleading statistics by members of the UK Government about Welsh cancer patients treated in England.

In the most recent case, the Secretary of State for Health Jeremy Hunt tweeted from his account @Jeremy_Hunt on December 5, 2014 at 11.29am: "Is this about politics or because they believe it? If belief, why no fund in Wales, which sends 6500 to Eng for cancer treatment every year."¹

The same figure was also quoted by Mr Hunt in Parliament on November 25 when he stated: "...which is why 6,500 Welsh cancer patients were admitted for treatment in English hospitals last year."²

Officials in the Welsh Government have raised this matter with their counterparts in the Department for Health who have advised that these numbers refer not to patients treated but to admission episodes, thus inflating the numbers significantly. The statistics are taken from Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) produced by the Health and Social Care Information Centre for 2012-13.

Unfortunately, this is not the first instance of this. In October the *Daily Mail* wrote that the: "Number of cancer 'refugees' quadrupled in a decade to 15,450 last year"³. The source of this was again based on admission episodes rather than patients⁴. In our own response to

¹ https://twitter.com/Jeremy_Hunt/status/542264794662060032

² <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmhansrd/cm141125/debtext/141125-0001.htm#14112530000250>

³ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2800815/patients-mass-exodus-england-labour-blocks-international-inquiry-crisis-hit-welsh-nhs-thousands-cross-border-life-saving-treatment.html>

⁴ http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm140305/text/140305w0002.htm#140305w002.htm_wqn81

the *Daily Mail's* claims⁵ we pointed out that given that there are 16,000 new patients treated every year in Wales, 15,000 of them would not be sent to England for treatment. Our press office followed this up with the newspaper directly once we had identified the source advising it these statements were based on admissions, rather than patients, however it has not corrected the original story.

The repeated misuse of these statistics by the Secretary of State provides an entirely false aura of authenticity to such media reports and, in effect, licences their continuation.

The use of admissions figures rather than patients data is wholly misleading, and appears to be an ongoing issue. As cancer patients are likely to have multiple admission episodes, these numbers are far larger than they would be had the correct numbers been used. Our own analysis shows the admissions episodes only relates to 2,350⁶ patients – much lower than the 6,500 being quoted.

While it is absolutely right that there is open debate about the different health policies in the UK, the inappropriate use of statistics for political gain is of great concern to me.

I would welcome your views on this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Mark Drakeford

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⁵ <http://wales.gov.uk/newsroom/healthandsocialcare/2014/141020daily-mail/?lang=en>

⁶ Analysis by NHS Wales Informatics Service shows slightly fewer attendances at 6,135 – this could be due to differences between HES and Patient Episode Dataset Wales regarding validation and cleansing of datasets.