



# Senedd Election 2021

A manifesto for  
workforce and  
wellbeing



# The Royal College of Anaesthetists' manifesto for the 2021 Senedd Election

To inform the development of our manifesto priorities, we consulted with our members living in Wales and our partners working across the wider health and care sector.

They told us the next Senedd needs to:

- ✓ address anaesthetic workforce shortages
- ✓ support the health and wellbeing of NHS staff
- ✓ put clearing the elective surgery backlog at the heart of the COVID-19 recovery
- ✓ reduce the NHS's environmental footprint
- ✓ prioritise the public's health by taking action on obesity.

## Dear candidate

Anaesthesia is the UK's single largest hospital speciality – 16 per cent of all hospital consultants are anaesthetists – playing a vital role in the care of two-thirds of all hospital patients. Anaesthetists are essential to the majority of hospital activity, from the labour ward to the intensive care unit, providing care for patients of all ages and across a wide spectrum of conditions and treatments.

During the pandemic, the central role of the anaesthetist in routine and critical care has become more apparent than ever. Anaesthetists across Wales and the rest of the UK have stepped up to support the NHS at its time of greatest need, treating the sickest COVID-19 patients while helping to maintain cancer, maternity, and other urgent and planned services.

This has come at a great personal cost for many of our members, placing in sharp relief the workforce shortages across our speciality and highlighting the need to prioritise the health and wellbeing of staff as the NHS continues to respond to and recover from the pandemic.

With the election fast approaching, the Royal College of Anaesthetists in Wales is putting forward our priorities for change. In this manifesto we lay out five themes our members are telling us they most want to see action on over the course of this new Senedd.

As a candidate in this election, we welcome your feedback on our priorities and would be keen to meet to discuss any or all the points we have raised. To get in touch with us, please email [advocacy@coa.ac.uk](mailto:advocacy@coa.ac.uk) or visit our elections campaign page [here](#).

Thank you very much and we look forward to hearing from you.

Best of luck with your campaign!



### **Dr Abrie Theron**

Chair, Wales Board  
Royal College of Anaesthetists



# 1

## Address anaesthetic workforce shortages

### The RCoA in Wales is calling:

- for the Government to continue to commit to training number expansion and **filling the anaesthetic consultant gap** in Wales
- for the Government to continue to work with Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) to publish **a national anaesthetic workforce strategy** which addresses shortages in the entire anaesthetic workforce, underscored by population-based needs modelling.



### Why are we calling for this?

The anaesthetic profession across the UK, but particularly in Wales, has considerable workforce gaps.

The RCoA's Workforce Census (2020) shows that Wales has a 'real consultant gap' of 17.8 per cent – meaning that Wales is currently 'missing' nearly 100 anaesthetic consultants that patient demand requires.<sup>1</sup> This is the largest anaesthetic consultant gap in the UK and it means that over 70,000 surgical procedures in Wales will need to be delayed every year until it is filled.<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, the wider team of SAS anaesthetists, operating department practitioners, anaesthetic nurses, and anaesthesia associates needs to be in place too. Once more our latest census shows worrying trends in this regard – for example, we currently have a 28.9 per cent 'real SAS gap' in Wales.<sup>1</sup>

The entire anaesthetic team has been critical to the COVID-19 response and, so too, will be a driving force behind the NHS's recovery efforts – from the recovery of elective surgery capacity, to pandemic 'future proofing' of critical care, to leading perioperative care across the entire surgical pathway.

We welcome the recent steps that HEIW has taken to close the anaesthetic workforce deficit and the agency's commitment to review the workforce as part of its future workforce commissioning recommendations.<sup>3</sup> We are now calling on the Government and HEIW to go further still and commit to publish a national anaesthetic workforce strategy, that is underscored by population needs modelling and matched by investment for its delivery.

# 2

## Support the health and wellbeing of NHS staff

### The RCoA in Wales is calling:

- for the Government to develop and roll out **a package of wellbeing support measures** for NHS staff in Wales that prioritises providing rest and 24-hour catering facilities in every Health Board and the provision of timely occupational health support
- for the Government to continue to **support the mental wellbeing of anaesthetists** and all NHS staff through Health for Healthcare Professionals and Wellbeing and Resilience training currently on offer to all healthcare staff in Wales.



### Why are we calling for this?

A Healthier Wales states that ‘our staff, their skills, experience and values, are fundamental to a successful NHS and social care system’, adding that there also needs to be a renewed focus on supporting the health and wellbeing of staff if the NHS in Wales is to be placed on a sustainable footing.<sup>4</sup>

The RCoA shares that perspective. Prior to the pandemic, our members – particularly anaesthetists in training- were already reporting signs of burn-out, including poor mental and physical health, disengagement from work, and working without adequate nutrition or hydration.<sup>5</sup>

The pandemic has exacerbated this trend, with our members reporting that their mental health and wellbeing has been significantly impacted due to the pressures they have faced on the COVID-19 frontline.<sup>6</sup> Worryingly, a recent RCoA poll showed that nearly 1 in 5 anaesthetists we surveyed are now considering leaving the profession. Our specialty is not alone in feeling like this – NHS staff across the system are exhausted and in need of more support.

The next Senedd has the opportunity to build on on-going work that the NHS in Wales is currently doing, and prioritise wellbeing for NHS staff as a key plank of COVID-19 recovery measures and long-term NHS workforce planning.

# 3

## Put clearing the elective surgery backlog at the heart of the COVID-19 recovery

### The RCoA in Wales is calling:

- for the Government to publish **a national strategy to deal with the backlog** of elective surgery, with dedicated funding to deliver it
- for the Government to **create and invest in a new NHS Community Prehabilitation Service**, to ensure that patients are fit and ready for surgery and have access to any support they may need across the health and social services system.



### Why are we calling for this?

The pandemic has created a step-change in the number of people waiting for elective surgery across the UK. In Wales, waiting lists are now nearly eight times longer than they were pre-pandemic, growing by 73,500 since the pandemic began.<sup>7</sup>

More than half a million people are now waiting for treatment in Wales – the highest number on record – with more than 230,000 of them waiting longer than 36 weeks. Clearing this backlog to pre-pandemic levels is likely to take years.

This is so serious that we are now calling on the Welsh Government to place clearing the backlog at the heart of its COVID-19 recovery planning by publishing a national strategy to deal with the backlog, backed by ringfenced funding for its delivery.

We believe that supporting patients to optimise their health while they are waiting for their surgery should be a key part of this elective backlog strategy – helping patients be ready for when the NHS is ready for them.

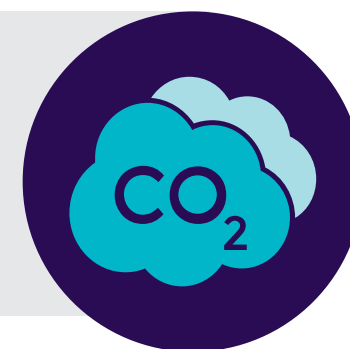
One way to do this is through prehabilitation programmes that help people get ready for surgery through things like physical exercise, smoking cessation, psychological support, nutritional support, or other healthy lifestyle interventions. We're now calling on the Welsh Government to roll out already existing community prehabilitation support programmes more widely.

# 4

## Reduce the NHS's environmental footprint

### The RCoA in Wales is calling:

- for the Government and the NHS in Wales to work with the RCoA to develop a **strategy for reducing the environmental impact of anaesthesia** and commit funding for its implementation over the course of the new Senedd
- for the next Welsh Government to build on its stated commitments and progress around **sustainable procurement** by ensuring that all anaesthetic devices that the NHS in Wales uses are assessed against their environmental cost, as well as their other costs and benefits.



### Why are we calling for this?

The climate crisis is one of the most pressing public health challenges we face. Exposure to toxic air pollution is estimated to cause 40,000 premature deaths in the UK every year. Public Health Wales estimates that between 1,000 and 1,400 people in Wales die every year due to long-term air pollution exposure.<sup>9</sup> Long-term exposure to air pollution can also cause chronic health conditions, such as cardiovascular and respiratory diseases as well as lung cancer.<sup>10</sup>

Air pollution impacts different groups of people differently. Children, people who work in city centres, and those with pre-existing heart and lung problems are more impacted. Air pollution also tends to disproportionately impact socio-economically disadvantaged people, further entrenching health inequalities.

The NHS has a key role to play in making our communities healthier in this regard. Across the UK, the NHS is responsible for around five per cent of UK net greenhouse gas emissions.

Anaesthesia is particularly important for this agenda because of the impact of anaesthetic gases, estimated to be around five per cent of the total carbon footprint of acute NHS Trusts.<sup>11</sup> For example, using a bottle of desflurane – a commonly used anaesthetic gas – has the same warming effect as burning 440kg of coal.<sup>12</sup>

We can make simple changes to the way our specialty operates – such as switching to lower carbon anaesthetic techniques – that will have a significant impact on the NHS's environmental footprint and, in turn, the health of our patients.

Exploring and understanding the environmental cost of all equipment, but particularly single use equipment, like laryngoscopes, will aid us in making better procurement decisions for the environment.

# 5

## Prioritise the public's health by taking action on obesity

### The RCoA in Wales is calling:

- for the Government to review **the use of food subsidies and taxes** to lower the price of fruit and vegetables and raise the price of junk food
- for the Government **to adopt all the food marketing restrictions** set out in 'Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales', including a ban on the advertising, sponsorship, and promotion of foods high in fat, sugar, and salt in public spaces.



### Why are we calling for this?

Obesity is a leading public health concern in Wales and across the UK. In Wales, over 60 per cent of the adult population (1.5 million people) is overweight or obese, and 27 per cent of children are overweight.<sup>13</sup>

Obesity and poor diet are linked with type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and increased risk of respiratory, musculoskeletal and liver diseases. Obese people are also at increased risk of certain cancers.

The causes of obesity are complex and multi-factorial. The current obesogenic environment makes it difficult for families and individuals to make healthy choices about the food they consume and the physical activity they can do.

When we asked our members to consider a range of public health regulatory measures that, if implemented, would most improve the health of their patients, they told us that measures targeting the food environment would be the most impactful.

We welcome the Welsh Government's current commitments in 'Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales' to creating food environments where 'healthier food and drink is widely available, appealing, and affordable, making the healthier choice the easy choice.'

We note that the Government has currently committed to a review of its food taxation policy if the pace of food reformulation does not meet expectations. We encourage the next Senedd to accelerate those plans and use its powers to make healthy food the affordable choice.<sup>14</sup>

We also welcome commitments to ban the advertising, sponsorship and promotion of foods high in fat, sugar, and salt in public spaces. Evidence shows that these types of foods are more likely to be promoted and that they contribute to a significant proportion of an individual's sugar intake -7.4g of sugar per individual per day.<sup>15</sup>





# Tell us what you think

## The RCoA in Wales thinks the next Senedd needs to:

- ✓ address anaesthetic workforce shortages
- ✓ support the health and wellbeing of NHS staff
- ✓ put clearing the elective surgery backlog at the heart of the COVID-19 recovery
- ✓ reduce the NHS's environmental footprint
- ✓ prioritise the public's health by taking action on obesity.

We'd love to hear from all prospective Senedd candidates about any or all of our priority areas.

Please let us know what you think by emailing [advocacy@rcoa.ac.uk](mailto:advocacy@rcoa.ac.uk) or by tweeting us at [@RCoANews](https://twitter.com/RCoANews).

**Thank you and we look forward to hearing from you!**



# References

- 1 [RCoA Medical Workforce Census Report 2020, RCoA.](#)
- 2 94 consultant anaesthetists are required to fill current workforce gaps in Wales. The average anaesthetist across all grades treats 750 patients per year.
- 3 [HEIW response to The Royal College of Anaesthetists \(RCoA\) Medical Workforce Census Report.](#)
- 4 [Health Education and Improvement Wales A Healthier Wales: our Plan for Health and Social Care, Welsh Government.](#)
- 5 [A report on the welfare, morale and experiences of anaesthetists in training: the need to listen, 2017, RCoA.](#)
- 6 [View from the frontline of anaesthesia 2020, RCoA.](#)
- 7 [NHS activity and performance summary: October and November 2020, Welsh Government.](#)
- 8 [Impact of perioperative care on healthcare resource use, Rapid research review, CPOC.](#)
- 9 [Air pollution and health in Wales, 2020, Public Health Wales.](#)
- 10 [Guidance: Health matters: air pollution, 2018, Public Health England.](#)
- 11 [The Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change Policy brief for the UK, 2020.](#)
- 12 [Putting anaesthetic-generated emissions to bed, NHS England.](#)
- 13 [Health Minister launches ambitious new plan to halt obesity rise in Wales, 2019, Welsh Government.](#)
- 14 [Healthy Weight, Healthy Wales, Welsh Government.](#)
- 15 [Sugar Reduction: The evidence for action Annex 4: An analysis of the role of price promotions on the household purchases of food and drinks high in sugar, 2015, Public Health England.](#)

## About the Royal College of Anaesthetists

The Royal College of Anaesthetists is the professional body responsible for the specialty throughout the UK. We are the third largest medical royal college in the UK by membership. With a combined membership of 23,000 fellows and members, we ensure the quality of patient care by safeguarding standards in the three specialties of anaesthesia, intensive care and pain medicine.

### Royal College of Anaesthetists

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