

The UK Covid-19 Inquiry
Written Submissions of the Covid-19 Bereaved Families
for Justice Cymru on Module 10 (impact on society)

Introduction

1. These submissions are made for the following purposes:
 - i. to set out the group's priorities and to propose issues for consideration.
 - ii. to propose options for impact evidence.
 - iii. to highlight the cross-cutting nature of Module 10 and to propose Inquiry engagement with core participants for the purposes of identifying relevant evidence disclosed in other modules.

Priorities and proposed issues for consideration

2. The group welcomes the confirmation within the Provisional Outline of Scope for Module 10 and Counsel to the Inquiry's note that the impact on the bereaved will be investigated in Module 10.
3. Given that the impact of bereavement has and continues to be experienced by hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people across the UK, the enormity and significance of this task cannot be understated.
4. In these short submissions the group seeks to highlight some of issues that it will be essential for the Inquiry to investigate. They include (but are not limited to):
 - i. The sufficiency of bereavement support services within health and social care settings in Wales, both practical and psychological, and in this respect the group asks that the Inquiry considers issuing a Rule 9 request is issued to John Moss, the Welsh Government Bereavement lead, and the person the group understands is responsible for the National Bereavement Framework and the National Bereavement Care Pathway in Wales.
 - ii. The extent to which older and vulnerable people with Covid-19 were de-prioritised, and their care and treatment compromised.
 - iii. The impacts of visiting restrictions, and poor communications, including an absence of information about the circumstances in which a loved one died, and a lack of opportunity to say last goodbyes.
 - iv. The lack of dignity in death, including the manner of death and the lack of availability of equipment and medicines for appropriate palliative care.
 - v. The impacts of restrictions on funeral customs and rites on the ability to mourn, and for family members to provide mutual support.
 - vi. The high incidence of nosocomial infection and death in Wales, and the lack of IPC protections, of which families were all too aware and which caused them anxiety and stress, i.e. families knew that loved ones in hospitals and care homes

were in the least safe place possible during the pandemic, and were forced to watch helplessly as their worst fears materialised.

- vii. In Wales, families experienced persistent delays in implementing safety measures such as testing and vaccination, which further increased their anxieties and fears.
- viii. The absence of an effective investigations and complaints process, including through inquests. This includes the National Nosocomial COVID-19 Programme, established in April 2022, which the group had understood would comprehensively investigate individual deaths from nosocomial infections, but was limited to a thematic review and an inadequate 24-page final report.
- ix. The lack of a strong voice in Wales to speak on behalf of patients, which is particularly important to redress given the deficiencies in the investigations and complaints processes in Wales, and the absence of effective regulation.
- x. Breaches of privacy through unauthorised photographs of patients, including the dying and dead.
- xi. Adoption of the Charter for Families Bereaved through Public Tragedy.
- xii. Feelings of guilt for not doing more or trying harder for a loved one, which were exacerbated by uneven application and enforcement of rules and restrictions between different establishments.
- xiii. Anxiety and depression, caused by the experience of losing a loved one in such terrible circumstances, including the need for ongoing medication and therapy and other treatments.
- xiv. Witnessing the rapid deterioration in the mental health and wellbeing of a loved one as the impact of isolation took its toll.
- xv. A lack of adequate national commemoration, particularly given the scale of the loss of life.
- xvi. Prolonged bereavement because of the factors listed above.

5. This is not an exhaustive list but serves to illustrate the wide range of the impacts experienced by the bereaved and their devastating and prolonged nature.

6. The group submits that it will be essential for the Inquiry to allow sufficient time for these issues to be adequately considered within Inquiry hearings and makes suggestions for how this might be achieved in the next section of these submissions.

Impact evidence at the Inquiry hearings

7. The group has noted and welcomes the Inquiry's intention to hold roundtable events and to utilise the accounts provided through the Every Story Matters process. However, by far the most effective and public means of considering the impacts on the bereaved will be to allow sufficient time within the Inquiry's hearings for these issues to be comprehensively and sensitively addressed in a public forum.

8. Such an approach will have the dual benefit of adducing the full range of impact evidence that was tragically experienced by so many of the population (potentially millions), and as a cathartic process, particularly for those who have campaigned for

so long.

9. The group is encouraged by the indication provided in Counsel to the Inquiry's note (at paragraph 51) that the issue of the provision of 'pen portrait' material is to be kept under review.
10. The group entirely accepts that it is outside the scope of the Inquiry to investigate and determine the individual circumstances of harm and death; however, it will nevertheless be important to obtain sufficient witness evidence from bereaved groups to properly understand the full range of the devastating impacts that they have experienced.
11. In the group's respectful submission, to do justice to these impacts it will be necessary to take a range of witness statements from bereaved group members, and it will not be sufficient for a single group member to summarise the collective experiences of bereaved families.
12. One option will be to request between 10-15 witness statements from bereaved family members, limited to an appropriate and proportionate length, from which the Inquiry may select a lesser number of witnesses for oral evidence. And the Cymru group will be pleased to assist the Inquiry in finding an appropriate solution.

Cross-cutting issues and evidence

13. By the time the Inquiry hears evidence in Module 10 it will have heard and considered a huge range of evidence across 12 prior Modules.
14. This will include significant amounts of impact evidence in a variety of forms, including witness statements, oral evidence, and documentary evidence.
15. The group wishes to suggest that the Inquiry seeks to engage with core participants to identify such relevant information for use in Module 10.
16. It is appreciated that the Inquiry team will, as part of its core functions, perform this task. However, the group suggests that the unique perspectives of core participant groups will add value to this process by highlighting issues and evidence of particular concern and importance to them, and that any such engagement can be proportionate and need not be the subject of a formal protocol.

05 February 2025