

October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2019

**RE: Welsh Government's Response to the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee's Report: "Everybody's Business: A report on suicide prevention in Wales"**

Dear Dr. Dai Lloyd AM,

I am writing to provide some further feedback on the above report, specifically focusing on Recommendations 27 and 28 on media and suicide.

**The Welsh Government's response to Committee Recommendation 27** appears to be quite weak, in my expert opinion. The Samaritans do a wonderful job at the national level engaging with media and monitoring media. To my knowledge, due to tight resources, they no longer regularly monitor regional press. They can retroactively monitor media when an alarm is sounded by a suicide response team, who could be concerned about a media cluster, similar to what happened in Bridgend back in 2008, but regular monitoring is not carried out. Regular monitoring can help identify suicide clusters and allow for earlier interventions when combined with suicide surveillance data.

If daily monitoring is carried out by The Welsh Government Communications team for all of Wales, can I ask if they are trained in responsible and ethical reporting of suicide themselves and would they know what to do in the event of a crisis, similar to what was seen with Bridgend? I raise this because I have written a book, "The Bridgend Suicides: Suicide and the Media" (Palgrave, 2016), and have completed much work in this area, including sitting on the Pan-Dorset Suicide Prevention Strategy Group, the Suicide Response Team in Dorset, as well as the Gold Group with British Transport Police and Network Rail for a cluster of suicides we are currently dealing with here in Dorset.

What I have learned over the last decade is that while plans can be in place, the training to implement those plans is not, so I would ask the Committee to further engage with the Government and seek assurances that such training and understanding is in place. And if this is the case, who is conducting the training and are they working from trauma-informed approaches, coupled with an understanding of how professional practices of the media operate?

I would also like to raise concerns about **The Welsh Government's response to Committee Recommendation 28**. While Professor John is a colleague and a leading scholar in the field of suicidology, unfortunately, she is not a media scholar and does not have journalism experience herself.

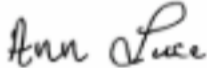
In recent research (in peer review) conducted by myself and my colleague, Dr. Sallyanne Duncan, Strathclyde University, who also provided expert testimony before the Committee, we learned that 73% of journalism students in the UK and Ireland are not taught suicide reporting on their journalism degrees. We further learned that only 46% of journalism students knew about IPSO reporting guidelines on suicide; only 42% knew about National Union of Journalists guidelines; and only 36% knew that the Samaritans had media guidelines at all. Our work was featured here:

<https://www.pressgazette.co.uk/academic-urges-journalism-lecturers-to-step-up-teaching-on-suicide-reporting/>

I would like to urge the Committee to take another look at the work that is going on in this area and please take measures to make it stronger. Dr. Duncan and I are creating a Suicide Reporting Toolkit that will be launched in January 2020, with a series of trainings and workshops that can be booked alongside it. We have also created the Responsible Suicide Reporting Model which should be rolled out to journalists, as well as journalism educators. Currently, this model is being adopted in India, Malaysia and Bangladesh as a way to reduce their suicide rates. The model has also been adopted in Dorset as a way to deal with unethical reporting during the current cluster of railway suicides.

As ever, I am available to support and advise on safe media reporting in Wales. I learned many lessons during the Bridgend Suicides, which I have rolled out globally to help prevent suicide. I would like to further support if you feel it appropriate.

Please don't hesitate to contact me should you have any further questions,



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Dr. Ann Luce  
Principal Academic in Journalism and Communication,  
Bournemouth University