

Implementation of Quality Standards for Vestibular and Tinnitus Services in Wales

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Introduction

Following the successful implementation of the Adult Rehabilitation and Paediatric Quality Standards (QS) in Wales, the Welsh Government Audiology Standing Specialist Advisory Group (ASSAG), along with the Audiology Heads of Service Wales group (HoS), proposed the need to develop QS for Vestibular and Tinnitus Services in Wales. This was so that Tinnitus and Vestibular Services in would benefit from a similar approach of mandated QS, which are externally audited, in order to maintain an equitable, high-quality service across Wales.

Method

Work began developing the QS in 2019. Initial development was led by a group of Audiology clinicians working in Vestibular and Tinnitus Services, with representation for all Health Boards (separate working groups for Vestibular and Tinnitus QS). The main objective of the working groups was to develop quality key performance indicators (KPIs) in the form of QS. Evidence was gathered to inform these standards and input was received from third sector representatives and ENT colleagues (e.g. ENT clinicians, Meniere's Society, ENT Wales).

The final documents consist of seven standards, as seen in Table 1 for Vestibular Services and Table 2 for Tinnitus Services. The standards follow the structure of the existing QS documents with a **Standard Statement** supported by evidence - **Rationale and References**, that is split into specific **Criteria** with suggested sources of **Evidence of Compliance** (see Figure 1 for an example).

The Wales QS process includes a self-assessment and a external audit of services which runs on a three year cycle. The objective of the audit process is to externally verify self-assessment scores (and evidence). Externally assessed scores must be presented to the Chief Executive and Head of Audiology for each respective service, prior to being made available to ASSAG and put in the public domain (e.g. on the Welsh Scientific Advisory Committee (WSAC) website).

Quality Standards for Vestibular Services in Wales
Std 1 Accessing the Service
Std 2 Communication and Information Provision
Std 3 Balance Assessment
Std 4 Vestibular Rehabilitation (where it exists within Audiology)
Std 5 Clinical Skills and Expertise
Std 6 Onward Referral and Support
Std 7 Outcomes & Service Improvement

Table 1 – Titles of the 7 Standards included in the QS for Vestibular Services in Wales

Quality Standards for Tinnitus Services in Wales
Std 1 Accessing the Service
Std 2 Communication and Information Provision
Std 3 Tinnitus Assessment
Std 4 Tinnitus Management
Std 5 Clinical Skills and Expertise
Std 6 Collaborative Working
Std 7 Outcomes & Service Improvement

Table 2 – Titles of the 7 Standards included in the QS for Tinnitus Services in Wales



Figure 2 – QS approval process

Standard 6 – Onward and Referral and Support

Standard Statement	Rationale and References	Criteria	Evidence of Compliance
<p>6.a. Each Audiology service is aware of their locally available onward referral pathways, and uses them appropriately.</p> <p>Patients are signposted to local and national information on relevant exercise programmes and support networks.</p>	<p>Services are varied according to the local area. Referrals may be requested from the GP where they cannot be made by Audiology.</p> <p>Participation in classes in community settings or online may be more suitable for an individual patient than repeated visits to hospital.</p>	<p>6a.1. The Audiology service has identified a comprehensive list of relevant national, online and local services and made this information accessible to patients.</p> <p>6a.2. Processes and protocols are in place to support referral to appropriate medical/ Physiotherapy services, where these are available.</p>	<p>Information regarding the referral process to other health professions (e.g. Physiotherapy, ENT) and to other services (e.g. national exercise referral scheme).</p> <p>Information available for patients on relevant community and internet based resources/classes.</p> <p>Examples of cases where referrals and recommendations have been made.</p> <p>Evidence of actions and patient outcomes following onward referral recorded within the patient record.</p>

Figure 1 – Example Standard Statement from the Vestibular QS

Results and conclusion

Following production of a final draft, the QS went through an approval process (see Figure 2). The document was shared with HoS colleagues in Wales initially. It was then presented for approval by ASSAG, followed by endorsement by Welsh Assembly Government.

We have now been appointed as coordinators by ASSAG to administer the scheme, collate results and report to ASSAG following each audit. The Vestibular and Tinnitus QS have now been added to the Welsh Audiology QS external assessment cycle with the first external audit being in March 2024.

References

Quality Standards for Adult Hearing Rehabilitation Services, 2016; Quality Standards for Children's Hearing Services, 2016

<https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-10/quality-standards-for-adult-hearing-rehabilitation-services.pdf>

