

Children to have access to epilepsy drug in Wales

Epilepsy is a disorder characterised by seizures which are due to abnormal electrical activity in the brain. Seizures can vary from the briefest lapses of attention or muscle jerks, to severe and prolonged convulsions such as violent and involuntary muscle contractions. Seizures can also vary in frequency, from less than one per year to several per day.

Children aged between 4 and 15 who have this condition will have access to lacosamide (Vimpat®) as adjunctive therapy in the treatment of partial-onset seizures, even if the partial seizure spreads across the brain.

In Wales, paediatric epilepsy is the most common neurological disorder, affecting about 0.7% of all children. Around 10-29 per cent of paediatric epilepsy patients find that currently available anti-epileptic drugs do not control their seizures sufficiently, highlighting the need for new treatment options.

A New Treatment Fund for Wales was announced by the Health Secretary, Vaughan Gething last year, making £80m available to speed up access to the very latest medicines recommended by the National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and AMWSG.

Under the new system, all health boards in Wales are required to make a NICE or AMWSG recommended medicine available no later than two months from the date the guidance is published, shortening the maximum amount of time before which a health board must make a treatment available by a third.

Health Secretary Vaughan Gething said:

“This is a great example of the New Treatment Fund working for epilepsy patients and their families in Wales. This can be a debilitating and distressing condition.

“The substantial investment that we have made in NHS Wales demonstrates our commitment to ensuring that patients receive the latest recommended treatments quickly, no matter where they live in Wales.

“I look forward to seeing the fund continuing to promptly deliver the latest, innovative medicines to patients who need them, making a real difference to their lives.”

[Bus grants to keep Wales moving](#)

Funding under the Bus Services Support Grant (BSSG) is allocated annually to Wales' local authorities by a formula that reflects their overall populations and their rural or urban characteristics.

The £25m grant will be shared between the 22 local authorities, and will allow each to subsidise socially-necessary bus and community transport within their areas.

The grant will supplement local authorities' own expenditure on bus and community transport services.

Ken Skates said:

"I am pleased to announce that the Welsh Government has committed £25m to help ensure a sustainable bus service across Wales over the next financial year.

"Local scheduled bus services are, and will continue to be, the foundation of our public transport system, allowing people across Wales to get to work, hospital appointments, education and leisure activities.

"They are vital to Welsh life and actually account for around 100m passenger journeys each year.

"I am pleased we have been able to maintain our investment levels in Wales' bus services despite increasingly challenging financial settlements.

"This is a reflection of our commitment to supporting our bus industry and to delivering an effective network of buses for communities as part of an integrated, multi-modal system of public transport right across Wales."

[Turf-cutting marks start of vital Five Mile Lane improvements](#)

The £25.3m project will improve the present road to modern highway standards, addressing poor visibility; bends that are too tight as well as narrow lanes.

This will be done by building an entirely new section of highway which ties in at either end of the existing Five Mile Lane between the roundabout at Weycock Cross and the new junction at Sycamore Cross.

When finished, the project will have improved access for HGV and development traffic to the St Athan and Cardiff Airport Enterprise Zones. It will make cycling and walking safer and give better access to the M4, offering more reliable journey times for customers, freight, regional and local businesses.

Attending the turf cutting ceremony, Economy and Transport Secretary Ken Skates said:

“This vital piece of structural engineering will have many more wider-reaching benefits than simply an improvement to a road.

“The work will also provide employment across the area. It will also provide a safer route for non-motorised road users, supporting commitments we made in the Active Travel Bill.

Alongside this, it will offer direct access to the St Athan and Cardiff Airport Enterprise Zone, again supporting our promises to increase job creation and employment opportunities.”

[£1 million to tackle period poverty and dignity](#)

Local authorities will receive £440,000 over the next two years to tackle period poverty in their communities where levels of deprivation are highest and £700,000 of capital funding to improve facilities and equipment in schools – ensuring that all girls and young women can access good sanitary facilities when they need them.

Leader of the House Julie James AM said:

“Local councils are best placed to know where to target effective action for tackling period poverty in their communities, which is why we are asking them to use this funding to distribute feminine hygiene products to those who need them most.

“This could be through community groups, schools or food banks. We have heard reports that mothers are going without so that their daughters can have access to sanitary products which is absolutely unacceptable in our society. This funding will help to address that very real need.

“Funding will also be used to improve toilet facilities in our schools. We know from research that many girls are starting their periods at a younger age and, while secondary schools often have the facilities they need in place, they can be lacking in primary schools.

“I want to ensure all girls and young women studying at schools in Wales have access to appropriate facilities which give them the dignity they deserve.”

Cabinet Secretary for Education Kirsty Williams AM said:

“The physical, emotional and mental health of our pupils is paramount. This funding will help ensure that these facilities in our schools meet the needs of young women and girls.

“We want all our young people to reach their full potential both inside and outside the classroom and this funding will help to ensure they feel properly supported.”

Brave, bold and brilliant winners are announced as winners of the 2018 St David Awards

Bravery (Announced by Richard Parks) – Laura Matthews (South West Wales)

Laura was driving through South West Wales when she saw an extremely violent confrontation between two men. She took it upon herself to break up the potentially fatal conflict, in which a weapon was being used. Calling upon her skills as a South Wales Police call handler, Laura remained calm and managed to diffuse a very dangerous situation.

Citizenship (Announced by Cairn Newton-Evans) – Mair Elliott (Pembrokeshire)

Mair Elliott is 20 years old and is a mental health and autism campaigner in Wales. Mair has Autism spectrum disorder and has been battling serious mental illness since she was 14. Despite her personal struggles, Mair spends her time campaigning for improved services and increased awareness of both mental health and autism.

Culture (Announced by Dr Phil George) – David Pountney CBE (Cardiff)

David is Artistic Director of the Welsh National Opera (WNO) and is an

internationally-renowned director and librettist. As both an artist and a cultural leader, David has made a unique and significant contribution to the artistic life of Wales.

Enterprise (Announced by Sion Barry) – William Watkins – Radnor Hills (Knighton, Mid Wales)

The Radnor Hills Water Company was founded by William Watkins in 1990 when he began bottling water from a spring on his family farm for airlines. Since then, the company has developed into a leading soft drinks company, producing around 250 million bottles a year.

Innovation, Science & Technology (Announced by Alwen Williams) – IQE (Cardiff)

Dr Drew Nelson co-founded IQE in 1988 and has led the Welsh semiconductor company to become an international world leader in the supply of epitaxial wafers for a wide range of products that enable technologies as diverse as mobile phones, high speed optical communications, ultra-efficient solar cells and low energy lighting.

International (Announced by Prof. Meena Upadhyaya OBE) – Phoenix Project (Cardiff)

The Phoenix Project is part of Cardiff University's Transforming Communities programme, launched in the Senedd by First Minister Carwyn Jones four years ago to improve health and reduce poverty in Namibia. They have worked across international boundaries to achieve outcomes that are having a substantial impact on Namibia.

Sport (Announced by Jonathan Hill) – Aled Siôn Davies MBE

Aled Sion is the triple world champion and double Paralympic Gold Medal winner for Discus and Shot put from Bridgend who has proved to be an inspirational role model for young people from Wales and the world – both as world champion athlete and as a young man who has dealt positively with disability.

Young Person (Announced by Eleri Siôn) – Jasmine Williams (Llantwit Fardre, Pontypridd)

Jasmine is 11 years old and dedicates her spare time to raising money for homeless people in her home county of Rhondda Cynon Taf. Last year, she raised over £2000 organising fundraising events in her local community. Jasmine has shown compassion and a maturity beyond her years to help those less fortunate than herself.

First Minister's Special Award – Gerald Williams MBE (Yr Ysgwrn, Trawsfynydd)

Over the last four years events have taken place all over the world commemorating the centenary of the First World War.

2017 was a particularly significant year for Wales as we remembered the Third

Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele) which saw the loss of so many Welshmen, including Private Ellis Humphrey-Evans who is better known as the poet Hedd Wyn.

Gerald Williams MBE, of Trawsfynydd, Gwynedd has dedicated his life to preserving the memory of his uncle Ellis Humphrey Evans, or as he is better known as Hedd Wyn. Hedd Wyn died at the Battle of Passchendaele six weeks before the National Eisteddfod in 1917, at which he was awarded the Black Chair for his poem Yr Arwr (The Hero). That chair, as so much about Hedd Wyn's legacy, is kept at the family farmhouse, Yr Ysgwrn in Trawsfynydd which has been lovingly preserved as it was 100 years ago by the poet's family.

Gerald, as custodian to Yr Ysgwrn, has maintained his promise to 'always keep the door open' since 1954, welcoming visitors from all over the world to Yr Ysgwrn, and doing so free of charge. Gerald's tireless work has helped to keep the memory of Hedd Wyn alive and preserve the First World War poet's legacy for future generations.

Yr Ysgwrn houses exhibitions about the life and poetic legacy of Hedd Wyn, together with themes of Welsh language and culture, the bardic tradition, social and rural history, and the First World War.

Presenting the award, the First Minister said:

"The 31st July 1917, during the Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele), saw the loss of so many Welshmen, including Private Ellis Humphrey-Evans who is better known as the poet Hedd Wyn.

"For over 60 years, Hedd Wyn's nephew Gerald who still lives in the family's old farmhouse, has worked tirelessly, on a voluntary basis, to preserve the history of his uncle's life and legacy for future generations. Gerald has welcomed thousands of people to the family home to share his experience with visitors from the local, national and international community.

"Make no mistake, without Gerald's commitment and dedication this incredible part of our history, culture and language would be lost. So my special award this year is to Gerald Williams."

The ceremony was hosted by Geraint Hardy, TV and Radio Presenter (BBC Friday Night Social / Codi Pac- S4C) and Catrin Haf Jones, ITV Cymru Wales Journalist and guests were entertained with music from Ify Iwobi & Co Band.