

## Litter picking project sweeps to victory at NHS Wales Sustainability Awards



**Above left (left to right):** Annie Hill, OT Team Lead, award presenter Ceri Davies, Executive Director of Evidence, Policy and Permitting, Natural Resources Wales, and awards ceremony host Andrea Byrne

**Above right (left to right):** Laura Offer, OT, Annie Hill and Freya Jones, OT

A litter-picking project involving patients at a mental health hospital in Swansea has cleaned up at the NHS Wales Sustainability Awards.

The Gwelfor occupational therapy team in Cefn Coed Hospital was the winner of the Resilient Wales Award category. This was for its project to promote patients' wellbeing by taking them into green spaces, allowing them to get active and connect with others.

The team, which is based in a high relational support rehabilitation unit that provides mental health care to men, also uses the scheme to educate patients of the importance of caring for the environment.

The annual awards are held promote the principles of sustainable healthcare within Wales and are presented to winners across the country's seven health boards.

Mal Mainwaring, occupational therapy technical instructor at Cefn Coed, said: 'We wanted to get the patients out into natural environments and give them the opportunity to give something back to the community.'

The project sees the group link up with the Environment Centre Swansea and join them on their fortnightly litter-picks. The occupational therapy team also takes patients to various green spaces and beaches around Swansea to pick up litter.

Judges concluded it was a 'great, simple, effective project that has both patient and environmental benefits that could be scaled up across other patient groups within the NHS'.

Occupational therapist Annie Hill said: 'People with mental health issues can often be marginalised in society. The litter picking group provides the opportunity for patients on the unit to engage in a therapeutic activity outside of the hospital environment and to develop new social networks.'

'There is significant evidence that spending time in green spaces improves mental health for both



the patient group and the accompanying staff. By collaborating with the local community environment centre, there is the opportunity for patients to continue to engage in this meaningful occupation independently in the longer term. It also encourages patients to sustain longer-term environmental action.

'Many of the patients on the unit have limited engagement in physical activity, as well as comorbid conditions. The gentle exercise involved within a litter pick has positive secondary physical health outcomes.'

'Furthermore, evidence indicates that when patients are regularly engaged in meaningful activity, their recovery outcomes are improved, resulting in a reduced number of days in hospital, which has a positive financial impact.'

She added: 'NHS Wales and social care is committed to the ambition for the public sector in Wales to be collectively net zero by 2030. Therefore, it is paramount that, as healthcare professionals, we act quickly to change and improve our practice, embedding sustainability at the core of all we do.'

'The occupational therapy service within Swansea Bay is currently working hard to embed sustainable practice within our service, recognising the pivotal role allied health professionals can have driving forward the principles of sustainable healthcare.'

'We recognise the urgency of action needed to address the climate emergency and the importance of our role in integrating sustainable practice into our everyday work. This project highlights how a simple idea can have a wide impact.'

Catherine Roberts, lead occupational therapist for adult rehabilitation and forensic mental health services said: 'I am so proud of the occupational therapy team on Gwelfor for their hard work and commitment to the patients within our services, whilst also being able to work towards the goals of the NHS Climate Policy in Wales.'