WELSH HEALTH CIRCULAR

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Issue Date: 14-06-2023

STATUS: COMPLIANCE

**CATEGORY:
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

Title: Introduction of HL7 FHIR as a foundational standard in all NHS Wales Bodies

Date of Expiry / Review: June 2026

For Action by:

NHS Health Boards, NHS Trusts and NHS Special Health Authorities

For Information:

Digital Health and Care Suppliers

Action is:

Notifying NHS Wales bodies of the requirement to adopt HL7 FHIR as a foundational standard for interoperability and advise of the need for compliance from June 2023.

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Enclosure(s): Guidance Document

Welsh Health Circular on the Introduction of HL7 FHIR as a foundational standard in all NHS Wales Bodies

Background

- Welsh Government recognises the need to adopt four guiding principles for health and social care data; data should be Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable (FAIR). In order to support these principles, Welsh Government also recognises that data should be described in relation to its syntax, schema, data dictionary or reference, and adopt, when possible, open standards, in order to maximise interoperability.

- Such an approach means that access to and making sense of those data requires no special effort because standards are used. Welsh Government advocates the importance of aligning standards with existing and provisional standards proposed by national and international bodies where possible.

Interoperability requirements to support (FAIR) guiding principles

- As such, Welsh Government is formally mandating the Fast Healthcare Interoperability Resources (FHIR, pronounced "fire") as a foundational interoperability standard for all IT and all digital systems/services.

- The standard was created by the Health Level Seven International (HL7) healthcare standards organization and encompasses a set of rules and specifications for exchanging electronic health care data. It is designed to be flexible and adaptable, so that it can be used in a wide range of settings and with different health and social care information systems. The goal of HL7 FHIR is to enable the seamless and secure exchange of information, so that patients can receive the best possible outcomes.

- Welsh Government suggest that an appropriate stable release, currently FHIR release 4, will become the default. Any alternatives to this position will need to be explicitly approved by the Welsh Technical Standards Board (WTSB) for a specific use-case or sub domain. WTSB in consultation with health and social

care stakeholders will develop a maturity matrix to support staged adoption and appropriate scoring when considering solutions in procurement.

- Adoption of FHIR as a foundational standard aligns NHS Wales bodies strategically with partners across the UK. A four nations wide collaborative project has already been established with full participation from Wales to develop a common set of FHIR profiles for use across the UK, known as the HL7 FHIR UK Core specifications (see https://digital.nhs.uk/services/fhir-uk-core). NHS Wales will continue to participate actively in the UK Core project and use UK Core FHIR profiles as the basis of FHIR implementation guidance for health and social care in Wales.