

Matters ^{Cancer}

Macmillan Cancer Support Parliamentary Update **Winter 2008**

Prescription charges victory

We want to say a huge thank you to all the MPs and Peers who supported Macmillan's campaign to get rid of unfair prescription charges for cancer patients.

We have been inundated with messages from people affected by cancer who are delighted with the Prime Minister's announcement that charges will be abolished in England from 1 April 2009. The decision finally rights a wrong which has stood for 40 years and will make a huge difference to the lives of so many people.

Barbara, 48, from Norfolk says, 'It's more than 10 years since I was diagnosed with cancer and I have really struggled to pay for my prescriptions. Sometimes I couldn't pay and just skipped them. Free prescriptions will transform my life and thousands of others with cancer. I was so ecstatic when I got a text with the news that I shared it with everyone in the train carriage.'



**THANKS
VERY
MUCH**

**WE ARE
MACMILLAN.
CANCER SUPPORT**

Throughout our campaign we called for the abolition of all prescriptions charges – we believe they are a tax on illness. So while we welcome the Government's decision to undertake a review of prescription charges for those with a long-term condition, we hope Professor Ian Gilmore's report to Ministers recommends complete abolition. Only then will there be fairness for patients across the whole of the UK.

More challenges ahead

Macmillan was also extremely pleased that Gordon Brown recognised in his conference speech that cancer has a far-reaching financial impact on patients and their families. Prescription charges are just one of many additional costs faced by people living with a life-threatening disease at a time when their income is often severely reduced.

Hospital car parking charges

We have campaigned tirelessly for the abolition of unfair hospital car parking charges. In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland we have helped secure free parking for cancer patients. In England more must be done to help. So, in 2009, we will single out the worst offending hospitals and ask local MPs to help us 'park the charges'.



Fuel poverty

We've recently launched a campaign to help cancer patients struggling to pay their heating bills. More needs to be done to help them keep warm this winter. See page 3 for more information.

So, overall, it's a big thank you for helping us get rid of prescription charges. But there's still much more to do to help tackle the financial hardships endured by cancer patients and their families. We need your support.

Cancer Reform Strategy one year on

The National Cancer Survivorship Initiative (NCSI) has been one of the success stories in a mixed first year for the Cancer Reform Strategy (CRS). The CRS sets out the strategy for cancer services in England up until 2012.

The NCSI – which is co-chaired by Macmillan and the Department of Health – aims to improve the quality of life for people living with or beyond cancer. Many patients receive poor support after leaving hospital or finishing treatment, despite cancer still impacting on their lives.

They can experience emotional problems, side effects such as severe fatigue or memory loss, or find it hard to get back to work, pay the bills or start a family.

Pilots launched

One of the first things the NCSI has done is to launch a number of pilots to see how post-treatment services can be improved. One area being looked at is how to improve post-treatment assessment and care plans. More pilots will be launched soon and the results will be used to persuade local commissioners that health and social care services need to change.

Local delivery

Macmillan is more concerned about other aspects of the CRS. We have asked Professor Mike Richards, National Cancer Director, to recommend speeding up local implementation in his first annual report to be published in December. Our regional teams have reported that the performance of the NHS locally has been disappointing.

CRS implementation plan

We hope Professor Richards recommends that a CRS implementation plan is published and that the performance of local cancer commissioners and cancer care providers is managed more rigorously.

Macmillan remains confident that the CRS will be implemented in full by 2012 if it remains a top priority for the Government and the NHS locally. We need your help to ensure it does.

Cancer patients will have to struggle against the cold as well as a life-threatening illness this winter because they can't afford to pay their heating bills.

Macmillan's recent research shows that fuel costs are a major source of anxiety for cancer patients. So far this year, nearly 40% of the people we have provided financial help to have asked for assistance with their fuel bills.

Cancer patients are paying higher fuel bills because they spend long periods at home during recovery. Their treatment also causes them to feel the cold more. Many face the double whammy of having to pay higher bills at a time when their income has fallen dramatically.

The Government has pledged to end fuel poverty among all vulnerable households by 2010. This includes households occupied by anyone with a disability, including cancer. But current fuel poverty support schemes aren't helping all those in need. For example, a 60-year-old cancer patient is entitled to a Winter Fuel



Payment but a 59-year-old cancer patient like George from Sussex is forced to go without because of his age.

He says, 'I'm already wearing two pairs of trousers, two jumpers and a woolly hat indoors and the worst of winter is yet to come. Sometimes I go to bed during the day rather than put the heating on. To top it off, my wife has just been

'Sometimes I go to bed during the day rather than put the heating on.'

George, Sussex

made redundant, so I haven't a clue what we'll do now.'

The Government will not meet its own target by 2010, or anytime after, if it does not take action now to properly address the needs of all cancer patients.

That's why we need you and your fellow Parliamentarians to write to Ministers from the Department of Energy and Climate Control. We would like you to ask them what they're doing to ensure cancer patients can afford to heat their homes this winter.

NICE reform and top-ups

We warmly welcome the recent pledge by Alan Johnson, Secretary of State for Health, to make more life-enhancing cancer drugs available on the NHS.

We expect the announced reforms will mean that far fewer cancer patients are forced to remortgage their homes in order to get the life-extending drugs they need.

In particular, we welcome the Government's new proposals to introduce more flexibility in NICE's evaluation of higher-cost drugs and their plans to speed up the appraisal process so that cancer patients can access effective drugs more quickly.

We also support the Department of Health in its efforts to work with the pharmaceutical industry to develop new funding schemes for cost-effective treatments.

A recent Macmillan investigation into exceptional funding processes revealed there was a great deal of confusion and inconsistency for patients applying for drugs

that are not routinely funded by their local Primary Care Trust (PCT). That's why we are also extremely pleased that the Government will now publish good practice guidance for PCTs about the handling of such cases.

The debate about co-payments has focused on whether patients should be allowed to pay for their own drugs while receiving NHS care. We believe the Government's decision to allow co-payments needs to be seen in the context of the wider reforms announced.

If all Professor Mike Richards' recommendations are implemented quickly and in full, thousands more patients a year should get their cancer drugs paid for on the NHS. Then, hopefully, only a very small number of patients will be forced to 'top up'.



You raised your cups and plenty of money!

This year's World's Biggest Coffee Morning really did create a huge stir! So far we've raised over £5 million to help people affected by cancer and the money is still coming in.

A big thank you to all Parliamentarians who hosted their own coffee morning in their constituency or visited someone else's event. Your dunking, baking and coffee drinking is absolutely vital to our work.

Contact details

If you have any questions about Macmillan Cancer Support's work, please get in touch with us.

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You can now view our new survivorship webpage at macmillan.org.uk/survivorship.

There you can learn about how people's lives are affected by cancer during and after treatment and what Macmillan is doing to support them. If any of your constituents have been affected by cancer and need support, please tell them to call our helpline on **0808 808 2020** or visit macmillan.org.uk

