

7 March 2011

Rt Hon Iain Duncan Smith MP
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions
Department for Work and Pensions
Caxton House
Tothill Street
London
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Dear Secretary of State

In advance of the Second Reading of the Welfare Reform Bill we are writing to ask you to consider the impact your proposed reform of the welfare system will have on people living with cancer in the UK.

We agree that the welfare system needs reform and welcome proposals to simplify a system that is currently confusing and bureaucratic. We also welcome your commitment to make the transition from benefits to work easier and more rewarding for many people.

However, we are extremely concerned that changes to disability benefits will mean that a significant number of people with cancer will be left without vital financial support at a time when they need it the most. We would like to work with you to make sure this Government's welfare reforms do not have the very undesirable consequence of pushing some people with cancer into poverty.

Reform of Disability Living Allowance (DLA)

Firstly, we are very concerned by the proposal that people with cancer will have to wait six months before they can claim the new Personal Independence Payment (PIP), which will replace DLA. We know that even the existing three month wait for DLA is extremely problematic for people with cancer.

Cancer treatment often starts very quickly following diagnosis and the needs associated with cancer can escalate rapidly. In the first six months following diagnosis, people with cancer face dramatically increased outgoings to cover expenses such as travel and parking for hospital appointments and extra fuel costs.

Without support for these costs as soon as the need arises, people with cancer will face increased levels of hardship and some will get further into debt. We hope you will ensure that those whose condition is likely to be long term, and who face extra costs immediately, will be able to receive the PIP when they need it.

Changes to Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)

Secondly, we believe the Bill is an opportunity to address the existing inequity faced by cancer patients where a patient's choice of preferred method of treatment can affect how their eligibility for ESA is determined.

Currently, only people who are receiving *non-oral* chemotherapy are automatically exempt from having to undergo the medical assessment and placed in the Support Group – where they are not forced to take part in work-related activities such as practice job interviews as a condition of receiving the benefit. This is in recognition of the very debilitating effects of this treatment.

However, those people receiving *oral* chemotherapy or *radiotherapy* treatment, which is in many instances just as physically and psychologically debilitating, must undergo the medical assessment and may be required to participate in work-related activities as a condition of receiving their benefit.

Since the introduction of ESA, medical advances mean that oral chemotherapies are used increasingly to treat more aggressive forms of cancer. Sometimes cancer patients can choose to take the same chemotherapy drug either orally or non-orally. Currently, their choice will affect the way they are treated in the benefit system.

Finally, proposals that ESA claimants who are expected to carry out work-focused activities will only receive the benefit for one year, without being means tested, will hit cancer patients particularly hard.

The majority of people with cancer who are out of work want to return to work. It can represent a milestone in their recovery and a return to normality, in addition to the obvious financial benefits. We believe that this proposal, rather than creating an incentive to work, will lead to many cancer patients losing their ESA simply because they have not recovered quickly enough.

For many cancer patients it takes longer than a year to return to work. This is evident from your Department's own statistics which show that 75% of cancer patients who could be affected by this policy still need ESA after one year. This is due to the length of time people with cancer experience the debilitating effects of cancer or its treatment and the multiple barriers they face in getting back to work. These can include discrimination or employers unwilling to make reasonable adjustments, such as offering flexible working hours or a phased return.

People with cancer, and the parents of children with cancer, are very worried about how the Welfare Reform Bill will affect them. Living with cancer is expensive and many people rely on benefits to make ends meet. We hope you will ensure that your reform of the welfare system works for people with cancer, so that cancer patients receive the support they need when they need it the most.

Naturally, we would welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues with you personally and hope we can work together to make the necessary adjustments to the Bill as it goes through Parliament to reflect our serious concerns.

Yours sincerely



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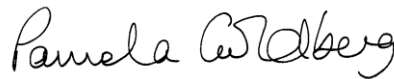
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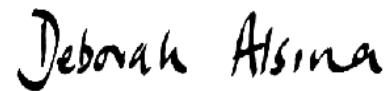
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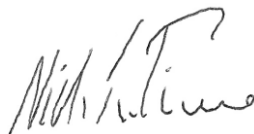
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