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[Debates]

ME and Long Covid (Specialist Clinics)

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Helen McDade (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)

To ask the Scottish Government, in light of the number of people diagnosed with ME and long Covid and recognising that early diagnosis and appropriate care can improve outcomes for recovery or long-term disability, whether it will commit to providing ring-fenced funds to set up specialist clinics staffed by either a nurse practitioner or medical staff in each national health service board area. (S7O-00083)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Care (Angela Constance)

We recognise the significant impact that ME and long Covid can have on the lives of those who are affected. We are providing 4.5 million pounds of recurrent funding to national health service boards to support them to deliver specialist support for long Covid, ME and similar conditions.

For example, in the member's region, the funding is supporting the delivery of NHS Forth Valley's post-acute infection syndrome service and development of the board's regional partnership with NHS Borders, NHS Fife and NHS Lothian, which will provide a comprehensive multidisciplinary team approach to support those with complex needs.

Although the configuration of services and staffing composition is a matter for NHS boards, we have been clear that we expect services to follow relevant clinical guidance, such as the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence's guidance for those with ME and long Covid.

Helen McDade

The ME Association estimates that more than 100,000 people in Scotland have ME or long Covid. Approximately 80 per cent of them are women, and most are of working age.

That 4.5 million pounds, although welcome, equates to 40 pounds per person for conditions that are often lifelong and cost the country huge amounts in revenue and care, but the costs to the individual affected are incalculable. In line with the Scottish Government's wish to move towards prevention or early care, which will lead to better outcomes, will the cabinet secretary meet me and ME Action Scotland to discuss what measures could be taken now to alleviate people's suffering?

Angela Constance

I am always happy to meet stakeholders to discuss specifics. I am also aware that the member spoke of the impact of ME during her first speech in the Parliament.

One of the benefits of providing recurring resource is that it enables health boards to develop sustainable support and also helps with the retention and recruitment of skilled staff.

The former Minister for Public Health and Women's Health wrote to the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee on the subject in October last year. That letter was 40 pages long and spoke about future plans for boards to enhance the support and services that they provide. I am happy to supply that letter to the member for her interest.

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