



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Douglas Ross MP
Member of Parliament for Moray

Aileen Campbell MSP
Minister for Public Health and Sport
The Scottish Government
St. Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

4th October, 2017

Doug Minister,

I write with reference to recent press reports regarding the recording of chronic pain waiting times in particular for return patients.

You will recall on the 15th March, 2017 I raised this particular issue with you in the Chamber of the Scottish Parliament. On two occasions I asked you about reporting excessive delays that some face from their initial treatment to being treated as return patients. You failed to give any assurance that return patients would be recorded in the future.

I now understand through Freedom of Information requests that officials from the Scottish Government were advised one week before my question in the Chamber of an opportunity to record return patient data. Colin Urquhart from the Scottish Government responded to an email saying "I don't think we would want to start publishing this information".

I have to say I am extremely disappointed that one week before you answered my question an opportunity was provided to the Scottish Government and not only was this refused but you failed to inform Parliament about this. Can I ask if you will review the official report of our exchange in Parliament which is attached to this letter and advise if you are satisfied with the response you gave at that time. Going forward will you also consider introducing waiting time information on return patients with Chronic Pain as this is an issue that continues to be raised with me in Moray and by patients across Scotland.

I look forward to your response both on the issue of recording return patients for chronic pain and indeed responding to my considerable concerns about the information you provided Parliament on 15th March, 2017.

Yours sincerely

Douglas Ross MP

Constituency office
63 High Street, Forres, Moray IV36 1PB
Tel: 01309 679253
douglas.ross.mp@parliament.uk

- Chronic Pain Treatment (Waiting Times)

- 11. Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to claims that return patients who require regular treatment are not counted in chronic pain waiting times, and what action it is taking to address the reported excessive delays that some face before receiving treatment. (S5O-00777)

- The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Aileen Campbell):

Scotland is the only nation in the United Kingdom to routinely publish chronic pain waiting times. That is a clear sign of the Government's commitment to making improvements for people who live with chronic pain.

Chronic pain waiting times data that was published on 14 March by the Information Services Division showed an improvement in the number of patients who were seen within 18 weeks, which rose from 60.4 per cent to 64.5 per cent during the quarter ending in December 2016. I recognise that there is more progress to be made and the Government will continue to support national health service boards to ensure that chronic pain patients get swift access to the care that they need.

Appointments for return patients will always be subject to individual clinical assessment.

- Douglas Ross:

I thank the minister for her response, but she did not answer my specific question about return patients not being recorded. She will be aware of reports last week that thousands of chronic pain patients are suffering in what has been described as a "hidden national scandal". It seems that new chronic pain patients are given priority in a bid to meet the Scottish Government's target of 18 weeks from referral to first treatment, while return patients who need regular treatment are not counted. Will the minister consider including such patients in future reports?

A return patient who has commented on the matter is Chris Bridgeford, a pain sufferer from Forres, who founded the Moray-based Affa Sair support group for chronic pain sufferers, which the minister mentioned in response to an earlier question. He said:

"We have people despairing of their lives due to huge delays in treatment."

What more can be done to ensure that chronic pain patients in Moray and throughout Scotland who require regular treatment get treatment when and where they need it? In her earlier answer, the minister talked about meeting Affa Sair; will she include all members of the Scottish Parliament who cover Moray in the meeting, so that we can continue with the cross-party work that has been successful locally?

- Aileen Campbell:

In my previous answer, I said that there have been improvements in NHS Grampian, because we have chosen to be the only country in the United Kingdom to publish the waiting times. I think that that indicates our commitment in the area.

Of course, we need to ensure that we fully understand the picture, which is why, as I said in my response to a supplementary to Richard Lochhead's question, we have given the University of Dundee £100,000 so that it can consider how we can better capture the data and drive improvement. The deputy chief medical officer will oversee and monitor waiting times to ensure that we get a full picture on how we can better help people who suffer from chronic pain.

I said that I would meet Affa Sair. I am instructing my officials to meet the group first and to do some work on the situation in Grampian. We will ensure that the member gets an update on that.