

Scottish Government submission of 19 March 2024

PE2086/A: Recognise the vaccine injured and offer appropriate treatment

As of 20 March 2024, almost 17 million COVID-19 vaccines have been administered in Scotland, as well as billions worldwide, helping to protect people from serious illness and saving countless lives.

However, it is important to acknowledge that COVID-19 vaccines are medicines and like all medicines they can have side effects and, on rare occasions, cause injury. Thankfully, most side effects are mild and short lived, but we acknowledge that some are not. The Scottish Government has great sympathy for anyone who has been injured as a result of receiving the COVID-19 vaccines. In many cases it may be difficult for a clinician to determine if an illness or condition is directly linked to vaccination, but this should not prevent them from treating the condition or symptoms their patient displays.

Concerns over the safety of vaccines are not taken lightly by the Scottish Government. The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) is responsible for the authorisation of and safety monitoring of vaccines in the UK. The MHRA keep the safety of all vaccines under close and continual review and Ministers would take appropriate action if new evidence emerged which called into question the safety of any vaccines currently in use in Scotland.

Our NHS boards have responsibility for service delivery, patient treatment and managing complaints. It is not appropriate for Scottish Ministers or Scottish Government officials to intervene in an NHS board complaints handling procedure. If anyone is unhappy with an NHS board's final decision regarding a complaint, they can ask the independent Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to review their complaint.

As part of the pandemic we gave, and continue to give, recipients of the COVID-19 vaccines as much information on the potential side effects as possible. Information on the potential side effects is provided with each

appointment letter, with prompts to access further detailed information via NHS Inform. Patients are given further materials at their appointments, including the manufacturer's 'Patient Information Leaflets'. Staff at clinics are also trained to answer any questions about side effects and each patient must give informed consent before receiving a vaccination.

As a core participant in the both the Scottish and UK COVID-19 Public Inquiries, we welcome the input and perspective that the Scottish Vaccine Injury Group (SVIG) will bring.

The upcoming Module 4 of the UK Public Inquiry on Vaccines and Therapeutics will consider vaccine safety and whether any reforms to the Vaccine Damage Payment Scheme are required. Please be assured that the Scottish Government is fully committed to supporting the Scottish and UK COVID-19 Public Inquiries in their work to explore the handling of the pandemic and to identify the vital lessons we all need to learn. Learning lessons from the pandemic is vital to prepare for the future.

I hope you will understand that the Scottish Government cannot comment on Public Inquiries whilst they are ongoing, but we of course stand ready to carefully consider any evidence, recommendations and findings that are published by both.

Population Health Directorate