

MINUTES FOR MEETING OF THE CROSS PARTY GROUP ON
CHRONIC PAIN, MARCH 15, 2017. (Approved at June 20 meeting)

The meeting was chaired by co convener Miles Briggs, MSP who welcomed all.

MSPs present: Rona Mackay SNP, Miles Briggs, Conservative public health spokesperson, Anas Sarwar, Scottish Labour Health spokesperson, Ivan McKee, SNP, Douglas Ross Conservative, Alex Neil SNP (Mr Neil for the first part of the meeting)

Minutes of the meeting of October 26, 2016 were approved unanimously.

Statistics on waiting times at Chronic pain clinics. The meeting objected strongly to the latest issue of March 14, 2017. Most key facts had been removed from the Summary by the health statistics body, the Information Services Division (ISD) without explanation. Patients, professionals and Parliament are no longer allowed to see in the public Summary distinctive facts such as numbers being treated or waiting in a quarter. Yet these figures are under the statutory requirement of reporting Referral to Treatment Times.

ISD previous statistics showed that only 1,610 new patients out of 5,235 referred during a quarter were treated on time within 18 weeks. These figures were used in an investigation in The Herald on March 6. And these are among the fact categories removed in the new issue by ISD. This would make a future investigation by anyone even more difficult. Patients present reported delays for return appointments increasing as first time patients were prioritised and returns not even counted. But The Herald revealed that too many “prioritised” first time patients were also not being treated on time, while return patients waited longer as short staffed clinics struggled to cope.

Clinical psychology and pain. There was much concern that info on the vital pain psychology services had been downgraded and mostly removed. A patient member credited this service with saving him from suicide.

Alex Neil MSP, former cabinet secretary for health, said that The Herald had shown that the waiting times were not acceptable and worse than we thought. He commended the Herald for standing up for chronic pain patients. The point was to help clinic staffing and patients.

Action point: Miles Briggs MSP and Ivan McKee MSP to approach the Health Committee to see if they can conduct a short inquiry into chronic pain waiting times and other problems for these patients.

Motion condemning information being cut was passed unanimously and a complaint to be lodged concerning ISD, also a request for Return Patient figures to be published. MSPs to question Health ministers and ISD.

Dr Gregor Smith, deputy chief medical officer, was welcomed as speaker. He also took many questions and stayed for almost all the meeting. He outlined that he had years of experience as a GP in Lanarkshire and knew the problems. Dr Smith said that

he would be the chair of the new Government appointed Advisory Group on chronic pain, but it wouldn't start until the summer of 2017. The CPG stressed they had been told nothing. CPG pointed out that this would be the fourth official group. Three others hadn't tackled the shortages at the clinics and no visible results were known. Everything seemed secretive. One group didn't even publish minutes.

Ian Semmons, chair of the charity "Action on Pain" said he'd been a member of one of the previous Steering Groups and found it "hopeless - just a talking shop". Rona Mackay MSP said there was "a vacuum of information"

With the new group, there must surely be action at last for patients and over clinic shortages?

The meeting stressed that the new group could not be the same as its three predecessors, which they believed had failed despite the Government investing an extra £1.3 million to run "improvement groups". Too little patient representation from the West.

Staff shortages: A clinician pointed out that Greater Glasgow, with over 1million Population, had over 20 pain consultants while Lanarkshire, with around 650,000 population, had only two pain consultants in an area of very high chronic pain rates. They'd lost three nurses. Pain staff needed to feel valued and listened to. Shortages were reported many times without resultant action. Chronic Pain was still "at the bottom of the pile."

MSPs Rona Mackay, Anas Sarwar and Miles Briggs pushed on staffing shortages repeatedly.

Some key answers: Dr Smith said that the new Advisory Group would tackle Boards on waiting lists and shortages.

He expressed concern at past lack of information to the CPG and promised patients and the CPG that they would now be kept informed properly.

He agreed to look into why return patients were not being counted and heard first hand accounts from patients at the meeting whose appointments had been delayed seriously.

An attachment to these minutes shows many more questions & answers.

The meeting thanked Dr Smith and he offered to answer later any Qs he hadn't got round to, plus he invited members to send other questions to him.

Action: Hon. Secretary to gather comments. (She sent these to Dr Smith)

Cuts: Centre for Integrative Care (CIC), Lightburn Hospital, (both hospitals dealing with chronic conditions). Updates. The meeting pointed out to Dr Smith concern over facilities becoming even fewer for chronic pain, due to the threat to close Lightburn Hospital and close the bed unit at the Centre for Integrative Care, both dealing with long term conditions including pain. Campaigning patient Catherine Hughes said there had been endless protests for years and a petition to Parliament, but patients views were "just swept aside from the top." Another patient: "The Board just doesn't listen" Ms Hughes said that, after asking to meet the health secretary for two years, she, Ms Hughes and other patients were called to Edinburgh "just the night before the Glasgow Board decided to close the beds at the CIC, when Ms Robison made it clear at the start she would not change her mind." Another attendee said there had been "a war of attrition against staff" at the CIC since 2005, despite them helping cut drug overuse.

Fibromyalgia patients protested particularly strongly over "lack of democracy" in health.

The Scottish Health Council "toothless hamster" controversy.

The SHC is stated to be a main “patient voice” monitoring cuts proposals at such as the CIC. Patients protested they’d found it “useless”. The SHC was called “a toothless hamster” by Neil Findlay, chair of the Parliament’s Health Committee, at their meeting on January 24. MSPs questioned the worth of the £2.3 million body as a “patient voice”. Patient groups have claimed that public consultations and engagement processes monitored by the SHC are “farcical” for patients and the public. This goes beyond chronic pain cases to dedicated campaigners against cleft palate services being reduced. **Action:** Hon. Secretary to contact SHC about their claimed plan for change.

Update on the Group’s complaint over behind scenes actions against an FOI by the CPG.

The CPG knows of the efforts made against our campaign over a year past to gain any waiting times for chronic pain. Several parts of the NHS were involved in aiding a Board which defied FOI law. The time of around 27 NHS staff was wasted. A CPG complaint was submitted by co convener Miles Briggs MSP to Paul Gray, head of NHS Scotland asking him to investigate if the NHS Code of Conduct had been broken. The complaint was lodged in December 2016, reply promised but no reply received by our March 15 meeting. **Action: continue asking for response.**

ATTENDANCE: MSPs

Miles Briggs MSP chairing, Ivan McKee MSP, Anas Sarwar MSP, Rona Mackay MSP, Douglas Ross MSP, Former Health Secretary Alex Neil MSP (for early part of meeting) 6 elected members.

NON MSPs

Speaker: Dr Gregor Smith deputy chief medical officer, Kathleen Powderly, Aberdeen, Dr Sabu James, Dr David Weeks, Dr Sheila Inglis, Dr Anna Graham, Ian Semmons, Dr Jackie Mardon, Linda Mawson, Tanith Muller, Janette McDowall, Kenneth McDowall, Laura Clark, Mary Craig, Catherine Hughes, Anne Hughes, George Welsh, Dorothy-Grace Elder (Voluntary Secretary), Ooi Thy Chong, John Thomson, Arlene Byrne, Frances Boyle, Carole Campbell, Carole Ann Brown, Hazel Young, Irene Logan, Rev Andrew Hunter, Pete McCarron, Geraldine McGuigan, Evonne McLatchie, Martha Heaney, John Lawrence, Alan McGinlay, Angela Donaldson-Bruce, Dr Ming Robertson, Dr Malcolm Maclean, Dr Joanna McParland, Dr Moira McGuigan.

Total at meeting 44.

ORGANISATIONS: Action on Pain, Arthritis Care, Parkinson’s UK, Fibromyalgia Friends, Lanarkshire Lignocaine Patients Action, Centre for Integrative Care, Save Lightburn Hospital Campaign, Edinburgh University, Glasgow Caledonian University, Council for Natural Health Care.

APOLOGIES

Jackie Baillie MSP

Margaret Wyllie

Lord Foulkes

Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP

Tim Eden