

Melanie - The announcement is pencilled in for next Thursday I believe. My only comment is that you or SofS should call M. Connolly + Lord Morris in advance of the announcement + not write to them

From: R. M. Gutowski PH6 after as

Date: 6 January 2004 Strategy

Cc: As Attached

the handling suggests.

Rob,

GRO-C

Hepatitis C financial assistance scheme - Announcement of details

Issue

The four health departments are now all in a position to announce the basic eligibility criteria and payment structure of the hepatitis C financial assistance scheme. We ask that you re-confirm the details of the scheme, note the outstanding issues, agree the proposed name for the scheme and agree the handling strategy to announce these details.

Details of scheme

The already agreed details of the scheme are summarised in annex A.

Outstanding issues

A number of issues regarding the administration of the scheme remain outstanding. Work is in hand to resolve each as quickly as possible, but none directly affects the announcement. These outstanding issues are -

Social security/tax disregard - In letters to you from Andrew Smith, Paul Boateng and Dawn Primorolo, DWP and HMT have agreed in principle to disregard the scheme's lump sum payments when assessing means tested social security benefits and tax charges/credits. In the case of social security disregard, the proposed new regulations must be approved by the Social Security Advisory Committee, which will meet to consider them on 4 February.

The regulations are also subject to a six-week Local Authority Association consultation period. This process cannot begin until the announcement of the details of the scheme is made, but work is in hand to ensure that this process starts immediately after the announcement. Once approved and finalised, it is expected that the regulations will come into force in April.

Medical trigger - the group of experts advising DH on the trigger point for payment of the second lump sum has agreed that it should be paid once a claimant has developed cirrhosis. However, agreement has not been reached on the test or tests that will be used to confirm this diagnosis. The group will meet again this month to finalise its recommendations. We are therefore in a position to announce the trigger point (cirrhosis) but not the non-invasive diagnostic tests.

Administration of the scheme - the Macfarlane Trust has now agreed in principle to administer the new scheme but will require support to handle inevitable enquiries from potential claimants. We are discussing handling with

them. Work on the development of the application process, level of evidence required to support claims and the structure of the trust (trustee involvement etc) is continuing. Stakeholders will be meeting to take forward this work later this month.

Funding – formal discussions of how the new scheme will be jointly funded by the four administrations have not yet begun. Each administration has already identified funds however.

Proposed name for scheme

For the joint purposes of the announcement and the drawing up of social security legislation, we now need to agree a name for the new scheme. Officials from the four health departments propose that the new scheme be called the 'Skipton Trust'. This follows the precedent of the Eileen Trust, which was named after Eileen House, the DH building where the Trust was developed. This choice will reflect the neutral bias of the scheme and ensure no obvious links with HIV.

Handling strategy

A copy of the proposed handling strategy for the announcement is attached as annex B.

Conclusion

You are asked to agree the name for the new administering Trust and that we proceed with the Devolved administrations in making a joint announcement.

R. M. Gutowski

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