

To note
- Submission seeking approval for arrangements for
launch of Skipton Fund

PS(PH)

GRO-C

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Cc: As attached list

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Launch of Skipton Fund – Application forms and accompanying guidance

Issue

The Skipton Fund, the body set-up to administer the hepatitis C ex gratia payment scheme, will become operational on 5 July. On this date, the Fund will begin to distribute application forms to those who have registered with it. Following consultation, final drafts of the application form for the initial £20,000 payment and the guidance to accompany these have been prepared.

Purpose

This submission outlines the application process and asks that you –

- Note that Registration Forms have now been sent to all those registered on the Department of Health's confidential mailing list
- Note for information the attached general purpose application form and guidance document
- Note that a further submission will be forthcoming with details of the UK health department's agreement with the Skipton Fund

Timing

Urgent – the Skipton Fund administrators have scheduled the printing of the application forms on Friday 25 June. If you have any detailed comments, these will need to be considered before printing.

Background

The Skipton Fund application process

This will consist of six steps –

1. Complete a Registration Form, either using a paper copy or the online version available at www.skiptonfund.org
2. Wait for an application pack – this will be sent to applicants on or before 5 July
3. Complete application form and return to Skipton Fund
4. Once the application has been considered, the Skipton Fund will inform applicants of the decision regarding their eligibility and either authorise payment or detail why they did not qualify
5. The amount of time it will take to receive payment will depend on individual circumstances, but the Fund expects to make payments to most successful claimants within a few weeks. If applicants do not qualify for payment, details of the appeals process will be sent to them.
6. At any point in the future, request from the Skipton Fund the application form for the second payment

The Skipton Fund Registration Form

A copy of this form has been attached for information. Its purpose is to efficiently introduce applicants to the Skipton Fund and allow for the managed distribution of application packs. A copy of this form was sent on 18 June with a detailed covering letter to all 2,100 registrants of the Department of Health's confidential mailing list. In addition, it will be circulated to voluntary organisations and targeted hospital centres.

The Skipton Fund application forms and guidance

The Skipton Fund will dispense three types of application form. The first two will deal with claims for the initial £20,000 payment. These comprise a general purpose form, for use by any applicant (attached) and a form specific to Macfarlane Trust registrants, who receive similar ex gratia payments for HIV infection. This group is well-documented by the Macfarlane Trust, a sister organisation of the Skipton Fund, and is deemed to have provided sufficient evidence already. This application form is therefore a much shorter and simpler version of the general purpose form.

A third form will handle claims for the Skipton Fund's second payment of £25,000, payable when an applicant who has been confirmed as eligible for the initial payment develops cirrhosis, liver cancer or requires a transplant. This form is now in the final stages of drafting, but is unlikely to be ready by 5 July.

Entitlement to the second payment is dependent on an applicant having successfully applied for the initial payment. As such, officials and the Skipton Fund feel that the initial payments must take priority when the scheme launches, as these payments will be made on a much larger scale. However, it is expected that the application form for the second payment will be ready in early July and will then be the subject of a further submission.

Function of the general purpose form

The primary purpose of the form is to extract evidence to substantiate a person's claim that their hepatitis C infection is attributable to NHS treatment with blood or blood products. This evidence will take many different forms depending on the applicants individual circumstances, for example medical records, documented patient history, National Blood Service records etc. The applicant is therefore required to complete the form with the co-operation and support of a chosen clinician.

Accompanying guidance and support

To aid completion of the form, guidance notes have been prepared (attached) and a telephone helpline established by the Skipton Fund. An article in the Chief Medical Officer's Bulletin will detail where clinicians can seek advice.

The guidance note includes further information on who can apply, when payments will be made, the appeals process and many other questions. As well as accompanying the application forms, the guidance will be published on the Skipton Fund's website.

Consultation on the general purpose form and guidance

To ensure that an applicant is able to efficiently manage and take forward their application, the Department of Health consulted widely on the general purpose form and guidance note to ensure that they are user-friendly. Patient groups taking part in this exercise included the Haemophilia Society, the Hepatitis C Trust, the Manor House Group, Capital C in Scotland and Haemophilia Wales. These groups actively participated in the process and are satisfied with the outcome, the Haemophilia Society in particular commenting that the form is a "pretty robust piece of work". Clinicians were also involved in the consultation process.

Decision making by the Skipton Fund

The Skipton Fund will in the first instance adjudicate applications on the basis of criteria set-down by DH. The criteria are not complex to administer, and in most cases will lead to a clear-cut decision. More complex decisions will be made on the balance of probabilities and at the Skipton Fund's discretion.

Conclusion

You are asked to note the Registration Form and note for information the general purpose application form and accompanying guidance. You may also wish to comment on these. Simultaneous submissions are being submitted to your Ministerial counterparts in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

You are also asked to note that a further submission will be submitted shortly detailing the relationship between the four UK health departments and the Skipton Fund, the agency agreement between them and providing an update on progress on the appeals process and second application form.

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