

Mark Drakeford AC / AM  
Y Gweinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol  
Minister for Health and Social Services



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-04-527  
Ein cyf/Our ref MD/00625/14

William Powell AM  
Chair  
Petitions Committee  
committeebusiness@Wales.gsi.gov.uk

19 February 2014

Dear William,

Thank you for your letter of 31 January regarding the petition from Porthcawl First about establishing a Cancer Drugs Fund funded by prescription levy. The Welsh Government has no plans to introduce a Cancer Drugs Fund. This decision is based upon the view that the NHS Wales must be an equitable health system and that treatment decisions must be based on evidence of clinical and cost effectiveness. A Cancer Drugs Fund, such as the one run in England, would unfairly disadvantage many patients with serious conditions other than cancer and it is not supported by all clinicians or the general public when presented with balanced information. Our commitment in Wales is to provide evidence based, cost-effective treatments to everyone, rather than give preference to one set of patients.

In Wales we have our own medicines appraisal system (the All Wales Medicines Strategy Group (AWMSG) which determines whether a medicine is cost-effective and should be made routinely available to patients in Wales, often before NICE complete their appraisal process.

Even where medicines have not been approved by NICE or the AWMSG, there is no blanket ban on availability and these non-approved treatments can still be funded if the patient meets the necessary criteria set out in the individual patient funding request (IPFR) process. In 2012-13 more than 210 of the IPFR requests were approved

The Welsh Government Cancer Delivery Plan focuses on what makes a difference and it covers the whole spectrum from prevention, early detection, through to treatment and sadly for those at the end of their lives – palliative care services.

Our free prescriptions policy is a key element of an equitable health service in Wales. One of our biggest challenges is improving the health of all Welsh citizens and treating major life threatening conditions like diabetes and heart failure as early as possible to stabilise the condition and prevent complications. Research tells us that many people with these conditions were unable to afford the medication they needed to manage their chronic health conditions before the prescription charge was abolished in Wales. It is not our intention to change the current arrangement. A levy of £1 per prescription item for the 74 million items dispensed in Wales last year would mean that some of our most disadvantaged and elderly patients would have to pay more than £8 a month (for 8 items at £1 per item) to pick up their regular, prescribed medication. This would simply not be fair and the associated administrative burden of re-introducing a system to collect and account for the monies would also present a significant challenge.

Our evidence based approach to accessing new medicines is a logical one and we believe it is the fairest way to use the resources available to Wales. The free prescription policy has not contributed to our decision not to establish a cancer drug fund in Wales; rather it is an extension of our commitment to ensuring all patients can access the medicines they need.

Best wishes

Mark

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