

PE1651/CCCCCCCC

Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport submission of 19 April 2021

Thank you for your letter of 25 March 2021 indicating that the petition PE1651: Prescribed drug dependence and withdrawal has now been closed.

The Short Life Working Group (SLWG) was established at the end of 2019 and despite the challenges presented by COVID, was able to reach a set of agreed recommendations by the end of 2020. We were very grateful for the valuable contribution made by patients with lived experience both on the SLWG and the patient subgroup.

Our draft recommendations have been published as a consultation which will enable a wide range of interested individuals and organisations to contribute. The issues debated by the SLWG are extremely important and affect a large number of people. It is therefore essential that healthcare professionals and those with lived experience have access to clear, up to date and accurate information to enable effective treatment. Once the recommendations have been finalised following the consultation, we will be developing and overseeing an implementation programme to ensure that the recommendations are rolled out at pace.

In publishing these draft recommendations Scottish Government has shown it recognises the issues facing those who are affected by dependence on and withdrawal from prescribed drugs. In implementing the recommendations, a significantly enhanced level of support will be available to sufferers and better information made available to prescribers.

Due to COVID, the majority of the work of the SLWG was undertaken virtually. We provided a forum for discussion and made notes of agreed actions available in an open and transparent manner.

On enhanced clinical guidance for antidepressant and benzodiazepine guidance, we have already established an expert group, chaired by the Scottish Governments Principal Medical Officer Alistair Cook. This group has expert and lived experience representation and will take on board best practice and research, including that submitted from petitioners. We have made clear at every stage that information will be taken on board and considered as part of the development of the guidance.

The petitioners submission of 15 March has mentioned the tools to be deployed as part of iSIMPATHY including: the 7-step Process, Polypharmacy Guidance and Polypharmacy App.

While the main beneficiaries of our ground-breaking polypharmacy work are those with multiple morbidities, the building blocks mentioned are applicable across a range of conditions. Within this are patient decision tools which the patient group had requested was expanded to include medicines for mental health and pain. This is currently in progress as part of the clinical guide development.

The 7-Step Process puts the needs of the patient at the centre of medication plan and is a demonstration of Realistic Medicine in practice. The Polypharmacy Guidance is an example of our range of Quality Prescribing Guides – the antidepressant and benzodiazepine guides, as recommended by the SLWG, will forward a similar format. Polypharmacy App is an example of a digital tool that will help both patients and prescribers, as recommended in the recommendations by the SLWG.

I hope that you have found this helpful.