

UK Allergy Services

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As allergies and hypersensitivities are well-documented in the international medical literature as being an integral part of ME / CFS, attention is drawn to the Press Notice and Report of the House of Commons Health Select Committee entitled “The Provision of Allergy Services” (ref: HC 696-1: Sixth Report of Session 2003 – 2004).

There were two evidence sessions. At the first session held on 17th June 2004, Stephen Holgate (Medical Research Council Clinical Professor at the University of Southampton; Chairman of the Royal College of Physicians’ Working Party that in June 2003 produced a report called “Allergy: The Unmet Need”, and currently Chairman of the National Allergy Strategy Group) testified that in the NHS there is a need for 20 adult allergy specialist posts and 18 paediatric allergy posts. Professor Holgate was unanimously supported by seven independent witnesses.

At the second evidence session held on 15th July 2004, on behalf of the Department of Health, Dr Stephen Ladyman MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, refuted that there was any such need for provision of allergy services and argued essentially that as far as the Department of Health was concerned, there was no problem with allergies and there are no waiting lists for such patients.

The Select Committee was not convinced by what Dr Ladyman said: the Committee found that the very absence of allergy services was the reason for his misperception, since there can be no waiting lists for clinics that do not exist.

[The ME community would be equally justified in applying the same argument regarding the lack of service provision for every aspect of ME, not just allergies].

In the Press Notice (ref: No.40, Session 2003-2004), the Chairman, David Hinchliffe MP, said:

“Allergies are one of the commonest diseases in the population, with 30% of adults and 40% of children now affected. The presence of allergy has increased greatly and rapidly in recent years, with the biggest increases coming in areas of serious and complex allergy.

“We discovered that, despite the escalating scale of the problem, specialist allergy treatment was very difficult to access. Indeed, there is only one specialist consultant per 2 million of the population. Experts describe the situation as ‘derisory’ and ‘a disgrace’.

“The Minister, Dr Stephen Ladyman, argued that there was no real evidence of unmet need. The Department does not have the full picture, as they eventually admitted.

“Further, we received worrying evidence to contradict the Minister’s suggestion that if there is a service gap, Primary Care Trusts will simply commission additional services, (as they) seem not to recognise a problem (no service; no data; therefore no problem seems to be their reaction). Services can disappear overnight as there is no secure NHS underpinning.

“We call on the Government to produce a strategy document showing that it really is serious about tackling this disease burden. The Government has agreed there is a problem but hasn’t yet faced up to it. At the moment, the NHS is not a national health service at all so far as allergy is concerned”.

Normally, Government is required to respond to a Select Committee Report, with the issues being debated in the House of Commons. So far, there has been no Government response to the Press Notice or to the publication of the Report.

Following publication, the Report may be viewed at
www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/health_committee.cfm