

BULLETIN



EVENTS

Drop-In:-

Greens Lane Methodist Church, Hartburn. We meet here 1pm to 4pm on a Tuesday. Alternative therapy is available for those who enjoy or would like to try Shiatsu.

Social Evenings:

These are held at the Orthoptic Supplies, 176 Belasis Avenue, Billingham, TS23 1EY, on the last Wednesday of every month at 7pm.

Shopping Online????

Buy items or book holidays through the Stockton MS Group web site and we will receive a donation. There are over 100 top retailers to choose from. It all helps raise funds for the group.

Monthly Bulletin

"If you would like to receive this bulletin by email, then just send a request to news@stocktonmsgroup.org.uk.

Remember if you change your email address to let us know by sending a message to news@stocktonmsgroup.org.uk"

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George Alagiah's 'guilt' over disabled toilet use

George Alagiah has spoken of his guilt at having to use disabled toilets while having no visible disability.

The BBC newsreader, who has stage four bowel cancer, used the facilities in the past because of having a stoma bag attached to his stomach.

When disabled people saw him using the toilets he would feel the need to "apologise and explain", he said.

Talking about living with the bag for the first time, Alagiah said it also required him to get his suits altered.

A stoma bag is an opening in the stomach where faeces are collected in a bag after part or all of the bowel is removed due to a disease or obstruction.

Alagiah, 63, returned to presenting duties in January this year after his bowel cancer returned in December 2017.

He no longer has a stoma bag after undergoing reversal treatment.

'Apologise and explain'

Speaking about living with a stoma on In Conversation With George Alagiah: A Bowel Cancer UK Podcast, he said: "I used to find it difficult. I had a stoma but I didn't look disabled, and I would be turning the key in a disabled loo in a motorway service station or something.

"And if there was a queue and somebody obviously disabled (was there), I used to feel guilty and feel like I needed to apologise and explain.

"The reason you need to go into a disabled loo is that you just need a little bit of space, to get the contents of your blue bag out and the sanitising equipment and so on."

The charity Crohn's & Colitis UK has launched a campaign calling for companies to install new signs on disabled toilets to explain that not all disabilities are visible.

It says people with such "invisible disabilities" are subjected to discrimination for using facilities they urgently need.

In 2017, Tottenham Hotspur became the first football club to feature such a slogan on their disabled toilets.

Alagiah also spoke of adjusting his clothes and changing his outfits to fit the bag, which included taking his suits out and wearing braces.

Speaking about his concerns over returning to work with the bag, he said: "I [was] always looking around at my colleagues and thinking, 'Can they smell anything, can they hear anything?'"

Dr Lisa Wilde, from Bowel Cancer UK, said stomas remained a "hidden part of living with the disease".

She said: "We know that many of our supporters face everyday challenges to manage their stoma, and one of these is accessing disabled toilets, as it's not a visible disability.

"We're determined to improve the quality of life of everyone affected by bowel cancer and to help people live well with a stoma."

Alagiah hosts the first series of Bowel Cancer UK's podcasts, interviewing supporters and leading experts on the disease, as well as discussing his own treatment and diagnosis.

Bowel cancer is the UK's fourth most common cancer and second biggest killer cancer with more than 16,000 people dying from the disease every year.

It is treatable and can be curable, especially if diagnosed early.

Opioid painkillers 'must carry prominent warnings'

All opioid medicines in the UK will carry prominent warnings on their labels saying they can cause addiction, the health secretary has announced.

Matt Hancock acted after figures in England and Wales revealed a more-than 60% increase in prescriptions for opioid painkillers in the last decade.

People needed protection "from the darker side to painkillers," he said.

Health experts welcomed the move, saying opioids can cause "life-altering and sometimes fatal addictions".

Opioids, such as morphine or fentanyl, can be highly effective for managing severe pain but they can also be highly addictive, the Department of Health (DoH) said.

It warned the number of prescriptions in England and Wales issued for these sorts of medicines had risen dramatically from more than 14 million in 2008 to 23 million last year.

The DoH added there are also some opioids available over the counter, such as codeine-based painkillers, which are weaker in strength but can also cause addiction.

From 2008 to 2018, the number of codeine-related deaths in England and Wales has more than doubled to more than 150, it said.

In Scotland, codeine-related deaths spiked at 43 in 2016, dropping to 27 in 2017, **National Records of Scotland** said.

In Northern Ireland, there were **16 codeine-related deaths in 2017**.

What are opioids?

- A large group of drugs used mainly to treat pain
- Includes naturally occurring chemicals like morphine and codeine, as well as synthetic drugs
- Codeine, morphine and methadone are among opioids judged by the World Health Organization as essential for treatment of pain and end-of-life care
- Some opioid medications - methadone and buprenorphine - are used to help people break their addictions to stronger opioids like heroin

What are they used for?

- Moderate and severe pain relief
- Limited time treatment of pain that does not respond to standard painkillers like aspirin, ibuprofen and paracetamol
- Usually used for acute pain - such as after surgery or terminally-ill cancer patients

Why are they dangerous?

- They can be highly addictive
- Pleasurable feeling that results from taking opioids can contribute to psychological dependence on the drugs
- Higher doses can slow breathing and heart rate, which can lead to death
- Mixing with alcohol or other sedatives such as benzodiazepines can also have serious consequences

Mr Hancock said: "I have been incredibly concerned by the recent increase in people addicted to opioid drugs.

"Painkillers were a major breakthrough in modern medicine and are hugely important to help people manage pain alongside their busy lives but they must be treated with caution.

"We know that too much of any painkiller can damage your health, and some opioids are highly addictive and can ruin lives like an illegal drug.

"Things are not as bad here as in America, but we must act now to protect people from the darker side to painkillers."

I was prescribed painkillers for chronic neck pain after an accident in February 2014 but the pain didn't go away.

I was taking codeine four to five times a day, tramadol as a top-up once a day, as well as naproxen and co-dydramol four or five times a day. Opioids affect your mental capacity, you feel dizzy, you can't concentrate and it's hard for you to do your job. I went on a three-week hospital pain management programme in October 2016 and they helped wean me off the meds and rely on other methods of pain control. I had all the symptoms, albeit to a lesser extent, of a drug addict doing the same. It feels like you've got thousands of insects inside your skin. You can't find any comfort, you can't sleep and your bowel movements are shot to pieces.

Professor Dame Sally Davies, the chief medical officer for England, has welcomed the government action.

She said: "We know that long-term use of painkillers can lead to life-altering and sometimes fatal addictions, so I am delighted to see measures put in place to raise awareness of the risks of codeine and prescribed drugs.

"It is vital that anyone who is prescribed strong painkillers takes them only as long as they are suffering from serious pain.

"As soon as the pain starts to alleviate, the drugs have done their job, and it is important to switch to over-the-counter medication like paracetamol which do not carry the same risk of addiction that comes with long term use."

Analysis by Fergus Walsh, BBC medical correspondent

Until the late 90s in the UK, opioids were usually restricted to cancer patients and for those in acute pain following surgery, but then they began being increasingly prescribed for chronic pain. As our population ages, the number of people living with low back or nerve pain is soaring. Opioids can be effective in the short term, but don't work for pain that lasts for months or years. The medicine packets already contain leaflets warning about potentially dangerous side-effects and the risks of addiction. Making these more prominent may encourage patients and their doctors to discuss alternatives such as physical and talking therapies. The variation in prescribing rates between NHS regions shows that it is possible to limit their use.

Things have been getting worse here, but are nowhere near as bad as the US which has four times the rate of opioid prescriptions as the UK.

Public Health England is already undertaking a review into prescription medication addiction and is due to report its findings this year.

Under Mr Hancock's plan, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) will have the power to enforce warnings on opioids packaging, following recommendations from the UK's Commission on Human Medicines (CHM) Opioid expert working group.

Dr June Raine, director of the MHRA's vigilance and risk management of medicines division, said: "This is an important first step to help minimise the risks of addiction associated with opioid medicines, while supporting patients to get the right information at the right time to support their care."

DISCLAIMER

Articles in this Bulletin are meant for the sole purpose of information only and do not necessarily reflect the views of the committee.

DWP forces carers to spend DECADES repaying up to £20,000 in vital allowances

In a few cases, repayments are being sought for over £20,000 - which could potentially take someone as long as 34 years to pay off - the National Audit Office (NAO) said.

Thousands of carers who were overpaid their allowance may face decades paying back what they owe - according to a spending watchdog.

In a few cases, repayments are being sought for over £20,000 - which could potentially take someone as long as 34 years to pay off - the National Audit Office (NAO) said.

The DWP detected 93,000 overpayments in 2018-19 compared with an average of 41,000 a year it detected in the previous five years, the NAO said.

While many overpayments were for one week, in some cases they went on for more than a decade before they were discovered.

Those who support carers said they are dealing with the financial repercussions of being overpaid on top of the demanding responsibilities of looking after others.

The NAO said the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is now detecting more overpayments because it has recently put in place more staff and new systems, and is resolving backlogs created by previous shortages of staff.

Frank Field, chairman of the Work and Pensions Committee, urged the DWP to "end this massive scandal" and "write off the overpayments it has allowed to build up unchecked".

He said: "Not for the first time, we see DWP squeezing those least able to afford it.

"It will chase down carers who provide such an immense service to our society, potentially cutting their income for decades - when it knows that a large part of the responsibility lies squarely at its own door.

Carer's Allowance is paid to people who care for those on a qualifying disability benefit.

The DWP pays £66.15 a week in the allowance to people who earn less than £123 a week and provide at least 35 hours of care a week to someone who receives qualifying disability benefit.

Emily Holzhausen, director of policy and public affairs at charity Carers UK, said:

"Overpayments of Carer's Allowance have been causing a lot of stress for carers who are worrying about the financial repercussions on top of demanding caring responsibilities."

Sir Steve Webb, a former pensions minister who is now director of policy at Royal London, said:

"DWP should recognise its own culpability in this mess and consider a much more humane approach to overpayments, with greater use of write-offs."

A DWP spokesman said: "We are committed to preventing fraud and error in the benefit system and we welcome that the NAO's report recognises the significant progress we have made addressing Carer's Allowance overpayments.

"The amount overpaid represents just 0.5% of total benefit expenditure.

"We have introduced new technology to prevent overpayments and improve debt recovery.

And we continue to make people fully aware of their responsibility to correctly report earnings and changes of circumstances.

"We have a duty to the taxpayer to recover money in cases of fraud or error but safeguards are in place to ensure deductions are reasonable."

The Daily Mirror's Fair Care For All campaign calls for carers to be paid a Living Wage, for a national commission on funding the care revolution and the creation of a National Care System.

We both now have hope - MS sisters

Sisters Zoe Bowman and Vikki Langford were both diagnosed with multiple sclerosis within weeks of each other.

But while Vikki has been able to get treatment for her form of the condition, Zoe has not. That is because Zoe has the primary progressive form of the disease for which there has been no treatment available on the NHS. Until now.

The NHS drugs advisory body, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), has announced that it has reached a deal with the manufacturers of a new drug to enable it to be available on the health service in England.

Ocrelizumab is the first and only licensed treatment for primary progressive MS in Europe. NICE had initially refused to back it because of the price being asked by the manufacturer Roche.

But now a deal has been reached, which means the average cost per patient will be below the full price of just over £19,000 a year for twice-yearly infusions.

For Vikki and Zoe it means they both have hope that the symptoms of the incurable disease, including difficulty walking, fatigue and blurred vision, can be delayed as long as possible. The treatment can delay the need for a wheelchair by seven years.

'It was awful that Zoe had nothing'

Vikki, 52, who lives in Battersea, London, was diagnosed with relapsing remitting MS in January 2017.

Her form of the disease comes in waves followed by periods of recovery, whereas primary progressive MS just gets worse.

She said: "It was awful knowing I have a world of treatment choices at my fingertips yet Zoe had nothing.

"She's my little sister and a lot of my anxieties around MS have been focused on her, rather than myself.

"I'm overjoyed she could now have a shot at hope.

"And it isn't just for Zoe - this decision sends a message that people with primary progressive MS matter and they equally deserve treatments and care."

There are around 90,000 people in England with MS - and the primary progressive version accounts for around 10 to 15% of cases.

'I felt isolated'

Zoe, 43, from Crystal Palace, also in London, said: "I felt so isolated when I was told by doctors there was nothing they could do for me.

"It was like being discriminated against - it's not my fault I have this particular type of MS.

"Now that there's a treatment available that could work for me, I finally have a glimmer of hope for the future.

"Anything that could help me keep my independence for longer would have a massive impact." Despite the approval by NICE, there will still be restrictions placed on which people with primary progressive MS can access the treatment, because there is insufficient evidence it will benefit everyone enough.

It is expected that between 6,000 and 8,000 people with the condition will be considered for treatment, but fewer than 3,000 of them are likely to be given it in the end.

Genevieve Edwards, of the MS Society, said the announcement by NICE was a "landmark" moment and she hoped in time there would be the evidence available to show that the treatment was beneficial for more people.

Talks are under way to see if the treatment should be made available to primary progressive MS patients in the rest of the UK.

Basic income of £48 a week in UK urged

Every adult in the UK should receive a weekly basic income of £48, according to the recommendations in a new report.

The move could be paid for by scrapping more than 1,000 tax reliefs, **a report by Professor Guy Standing, a professor at SOAS University suggests.**

The Labour Party - which has previously floated the idea of a basic income - said it would study the report ahead of drawing up its next manifesto.

A universal basic income is already being trialled in other countries.

The report, entitled Basic Income as Common Dividends: Piloting a Transformative Policy, was written by Professor Standing, an authority on the concept of the basic income.

He was asked to write it by the Progressive Economy Forum, a left-leaning group of economists.

Advocates of a basic income say it reduces poverty and inequality by providing a guaranteed income.

But Conservative deputy chairman Helen Whately said it would be "a kick in the teeth to hardworking taxpayers".

"It would mean benefit payments for everyone, from Premier League footballers to investment bankers and even prisoners, costing billions, while hammering ordinary workers in the pocket by scrapping the tax-free income allowance."

The Treasury also criticised the report, saying it was "committed to supporting working people keep more of what they earn, while providing a strong and sustainable safety net for those who need it".

"Our policies are highly redistributive - this year the lowest income households will receive over £4 in public spending for every £1 they pay in tax, while the highest income households will contribute over £5 in tax for every £1 they receive in public spending," it added.

What is a basic income?

Universal basic income, or UBI, means that everyone gets a set monthly income, regardless of means.

The author of this latest report, Professor Guy Standing, told the BBC: "A basic income would be paid in cash, a moderate amount, a basic amount unconditionally to each individual man and woman equally, a smaller amount for a child and the good thing is it would be unconditional and it wouldn't be means tested and it would be a right, an economic right."

How much would it be?

Professor Standing said the amount would change over time as the funding for a basic income is built up.

However, initially he said the weekly sum would be £48, which he said would be a "significant amount for many people".

"Now £48 is not a lot for most people but for a lot of people out there they have £20 left at the end of the week after they've paid their rent and their food, so this is a significant amount for many people."

A lower sum would be paid to children, under these proposals.

How would it be paid for?

A rough calculation shows that if about 60 million people were paid £48 a week, that would come to about £150bn a year.

Professor Standing said there are 1,156 tax reliefs in the UK at the moment and if they were scrapped that would pay for a basic income.

"What that means [is] it's income foregone by the Treasury. Most of these tax reliefs didn't have any economic rationale and they're giveaways that are increasing inequality.

"If we phased out those tax reliefs the total revenue foregone by the Treasury from tax reliefs is £420bn per year and that's their own estimates, not mine," he added.

Has it been done elsewhere?

Some countries have tested paying a basic income to citizens.

In western Kenya, the government is paying every adult in one village \$22 a month for 12 years to see if a regular payment can help lift them out of poverty.

The Netherlands and Italy have also launched trials, while Scotland is considering piloting basic income schemes in four cities, including Glasgow and Edinburgh.

Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell recently said that Labour would include a plan for universal basic income in its next general election manifesto.

However, a two-year trial in Finland, where a sample of 2,000 unemployed adults were given €560 a month, was not extended.

And in Canada, Ontario's newly elected centre-right government said it was scrapping a three-year basic income pilot project that hoped to discover whether it was better than existing welfare schemes.

This is not the first time this has been suggested in the UK is it?

No, there have been a couple of similar studies this year alone.

In March the New Economics Foundation think tank published a report in which it proposed replacing the personal tax allowance with a Weekly National Allowance of £48. However, it did not call it a basic income.

A week later the leftwing think tank Compass, suggested a universal basic income of £60 for each adult, £175 for those over 65 and £40 for children under the age of 18.

What are the pros?

Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell, who is attending the launch of the independent study on Tuesday, welcomed the report.

He said: "This report is an important contribution to the debate around inequality, austerity, poverty and how we establish a fair and just economic system.

"There have been pilots of 'basic income' elsewhere and Guy Standing has looked at them and come forward with proposals.

"Whatever mechanism we use, whether 'basic income' or another, we have to lead in developing a radical mechanism aimed at eradicating poverty, but also means testing.

"We will be studying the contents and recommendations of this report carefully as we put together our reform policies for the next Labour government."

What are the cons?

Opponents of a basic income are worried about how it would be paid for and what cuts would have to be made elsewhere.

And the government has previously said a universal basic income would not work for those who need more support, such as disabled people and those with caring responsibilities.

YOUR JOKES

Butcher is shoeing a dog from his shop, he sees \$20 and a note in his mouth, reading: "10 lamb chops, please."

Amazed, he takes the money, puts a bag of chops in the dog's mouth, and quickly closes the shop. He follows the dog and watches him wait for a green light, look both ways, then trots across the road to a bus-stop.

The dog checks the timetable and sits on the bench. When a bus arrives, he walks around to the front and looks at the number, then boards the bus. The butcher follows, dumbstruck. As the bus travels out into the suburbs, the dog takes in the scenery. After a while he stands on his back paws to push the "stop" bell, and then the butcher follows him off.

The dog runs up to a house and drops his bag on the step.

He barks repeatedly. No answer. He goes back down the path, takes a big run, and throws himself (Whap!) against the door. He does this again and again. No answer. So he jumps on a wall, walks around the garden, barks repeatedly at a window, jumps off, and waits at the front door.

Eventually a small guy opens it and starts cursing and shouting at the dog.

The butcher runs up screams at the guy:

"What the hell are you doing? This dog's a genius!

"The owner responds, "Genius, my arse.

It's the second time this week he's forgotten his key!"

MEMBERS COMPETITION

A £5 prize will be given to the member whose entry has the most correct answers. Even if you do not answer all the questions, send in those you have answered – you could still win!

- 1/ What are the following four letters after S?
OTTFFS
- 2/ In which European city do you find the home of
Anne Frank?
- 3/ How many stars has the American flag got?
- 4/ How long is the Great Wall of China?
- 5/ What is the largest number of five digits?
- 6/ Which south American country is named after
Venice?
- 7/ What is both a French wine region and a luxury
American automobile?
- 8/ On which mountain did Jesus take his last supper?
- 9/ What is the most fractured human bone?
- 10/ How many years is a French president elected?

Name:

Address:

Send Completed Forms To:

Mr D Henderson
74 Windermere Road
Stockton-on-Tees
Cleveland TS18 4LY

All entries to be received by the next social. The winner will be drawn from entries received with the highest number of correct answers.

Answers to last quiz:

1/ Crimean 2/ Glass Making 3/ Widow Twankey 4/ Prince Philip 5/ Rats 6/ Jason Bourne
7/ Chocolate Beans 8/ High Street 9/ Dormouse 10/ Insured