

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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Published by: Stockton MS Group, 74 Windermere Road, Stockton-on-Tees. TS18 4LY

NEWS UPDATE

MEMBERSHIP FEES

The yearly membership subscription of £5 is now due.
Payments can be made at the Drop-In, Social Evening or sent by post. All cheques made payable to Stockton MS Group please.

Payments by post can be sent to:-

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

RACE EVENING

At the Charity Race Night held on Friday 2nd November 2018 at Stockton Cricket & Rugby Club over £1,000 was raised for Stockton Multiple Sclerosis Group. Our thanks to everybody involved on supporting our group.

CHRISTMAS SOCIAL EVENING

The Social Night for December, will be held on Wednesday 12th December 2018 at 7.00 pm at Orthoptic Supplies, 176 Belasis Avenue, Billingham.

www.bbc.co.uk 17 October 2018

Benefits errors trigger £5,000 refunds for ESA claimants

Tens of thousands of people on sickness benefits will receive backdated payments averaging £5,000 following government errors.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has revealed it is paying more than £1.5bn due to the mistakes.

Some people have already received payouts of more than £10,000.

The mistaken calculations were made when people were moved on to the main sickness benefit, the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).

The errors were first revealed by BBC News in November, but the scale of the underpayments has now emerged.

'I have no idea how it was worked out'

Philip Stanton, 58, got a letter earlier this year about the backdated payments, followed by a cheque for £2,250 in July.

"You feel brilliant at first because when you're living on £73 a week, that's a heck of a lot of money - though of course it won't last forever," he told BBC News.

"But then you think, 'what if they hadn't found out? What else is there?'. I have no idea how it was worked out or even if it's the right amount."

Mr Stanton, who has been receiving sickness benefits "on and off for 10 years", has anxiety and depression as well as problems with his back. He said he was told his payment went back to 2014.

"A couple of my friends are in the same situation and one of them got more than me, which is why I thought I would query it," said Mr Stanton, from Northampton. "But someone else hasn't heard anything.

"I'm very grateful to get the money, but with my dealings with them, I tend not to trust them."

He said he has asked how the payment was calculated and is waiting for a response.

Assessors wrongly calculated the income of thousands of people during the process that resulted in people moving from incapacity benefit and severe disability allowance onto ESA.

Most of the errors occurred between 2011 and 2014.

'Appalling failure'

In a **newly published document**, the DWP said: "We estimate that around 180,000 people could be owed arrears payments, with around 105,000 estimated to be repaid during 2018-19 and 75,000 during 2019-20."

The government had previously said that all the backdated payments would be completed by April 2019.

The DWP said that the backdated payments totalled £970m. It now also faced a larger bill for ongoing ESA awards, costing the department more than £700m extra until 2024-25, bringing the total cost to £1.67bn.

Frank Field, who chairs the Commons Work and Pensions Committee, said: "It is welcome news that the government is finally making progress towards repaying people who have missed out on ESA.

"Its best estimate is that it owes claimants £970m - but the final bill could be even higher. The government must learn lessons from this appalling failure, as it faces the much bigger challenge of moving people onto Universal Credit."

The government has 400 people working on claims, with the priority on those who are terminally ill. Around 18,000 arrears payments have already been made totalling £120m. The average payment so far is about £7,000.

'Vulnerable people'

The government's original decision to only backdate payments to 2014 was legally challenged by the Child Poverty Action Group.

CPAG chief executive Alison Garnham said it was good news that 180,000 people would now receive backdated compensation, but said "it should concern us all that [the DWP] so significantly underestimated the number of people affected".

She added: "It should not have taken legal action to get vulnerable people the money they were entitled to from the outset to avoid hardship."

In a statement, the DWP said: "Anyone affected by this historic error will receive all of the money they are entitled to.

"We have worked with charities and other disability organisations to make sure that we are providing the right support to all affected claimants and are hiring and allocating more staff to do that."

Labour introduced ESA in 2008, claiming the change would move a million people off sickness benefit and save the Treasury £7bn. The shift from incapacity benefits to ESA was then accelerated by the coalition government.

The payments have come to light in a week when the government has faced severe criticism for its flagship welfare reform, Universal Credit.

On Tuesday, BBC News revealed that ministers were further delaying the rollout of the system, which merges six benefits into one.

www.bbc.co.uk 18 October 2018

ESA underpayment: Who is entitled to backdated benefits?

Questions have been raised from benefits claimants after the government revealed that 180,000 people are entitled to back-payments following years of errors.

Calculation mistakes were made during the process of moving people from incapacity benefit and severe disability allowance on to employment and support allowance (ESA).

The average rebate is about £5,000.

But some claimants are unsure if they are due a payout.

Who has been affected?

Most underpayments occurred between 2011 and 2014, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) said.

It affects those who were not considered for income-related ESA when they were switched to contributory ESA.

These people may have missed out on other payments, such as the enhanced disability premium.

How do claimants know if they are entitled to a rebate?

Anyone affected will be contacted by the DWP and all backdated payments should be made by the end of 2019.

A spokesman for the department said the process of contacting people entitled to repayments may take some time.

There are 400 DWP officials working through cases, with more expected to be employed in the next month.

What if a claimant has died?

Jeanette, from Hull, told the BBC her husband received ESA for two years while he was undergoing treatment for lung cancer.

She questioned whether the backdated payment would still be made as he died in 2012.

"My frustration is that the extra money would have been really helpful at the time," she said.

"I had to give up work to care for my husband and all our savings went out the window."

While the DWP is unable to comment on specific cases, it did say in instances where the benefit recipient had died, the calculations would still be completed and any payment would be made to the next of kin.

Will a rebate affect benefit entitlements?

Keith, from Somerset, received a backdated payment of £23,000. He was concerned the lump sum would mean a drop in his benefits leaving him worse-off in the long term.

"I received a letter a couple of weeks ago which said I was owed money," he said.

"My worry is that I will move on to universal credit some time next year and they might take money away from me.

"It feels like they are giving with one hand and taking away with the other."

The DWP said any payments under £5,000 would not be considered when other benefit entitlement is calculated - but any payments above that figure would only be disregarded for one year.

www.bbc.co.uk 31 October 2018

Spinal implant helps three paralysed men walk again

Three paralysed men, who were told they would spend the rest of their lives in a wheelchair, are able to walk again thanks to doctors in Switzerland.

An electrical device inserted around the men's spines boosted signals from their brains to their legs.

And it also helped damaged nerves in the spinal cord to regrow.

The researchers hope that this unexpected bonus will enable some paralysed people ultimately to regain independent movement.

BBC News has had exclusive access to the patients in the clinical trial, the results of which are **published in the journal Nature**.

The first patient to be treated was 30-year-old Swiss man David M'zee, who suffered a severe spinal injury seven years ago in a sporting accident.

'Try the impossible'

David's doctor said he would never walk again.

However, thanks to an electrical implant developed by a team at École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL), he can walk more than half a mile with the implant turned on.

As I strolled with him on a cloudless sunny day in the foothills of the Alps overlooking Lake Geneva, he told me how the ability to walk, albeit for short periods under controlled conditions, had changed his life.

"To me it means a lot. I'm surprised at what we have been able to do. I think you've got to try the impossible to make the possible possible. It's a lot of fun - it feels really good," he said.

David comes across as an overwhelmingly positive person, but after his injury he had some dark moments.

All attempts at rehabilitation had failed, so he agreed to take part in a trial led by Dr Grégoire Courtine at EPFL.

Dr Courtine recalls David's determination to succeed.

"I came with my daughter, Charlotte, who was one month old at the time. As we approached David, he looked her in the eye and said, 'I will walk before you'.

"When Charlotte took her first step she was 14 months old, by which time David was walking by Lake Geneva.

"He said to her, 'I have beaten you'."

To Dr Courtine's surprise, the spinal implant did more than enable David to walk.

"What was completely unexpected was the spinal cord repair that we observed.

"What we observed in animals is that it seems that the nerve fibres are regrowing and reconnecting the brain to the spinal cord," he said.

David had his implant surgically inserted by one of Switzerland's leading neurosurgeons, Dr Jocelyne Bloch, from Lausanne University Hospital.

She told me that she was also astonished at David's improvement.

David can now walk up to eight paces when his implant is turned off and this is the first time that this has been recorded in a chronic spinal injury.

Out of the lab, in the real world, it is hard for David to walk more than a few paces. The signals from the implant soon become uncomfortable and so can't be used all the time.

The system is also expensive and not reliable enough to be used outside of the laboratory for day-to-day use, so it's far from a cure.

Restoring movement and hope

David is the first of three patients who have benefited from the first wave of the treatment.

Two other men have also managed to walk again, to varying degrees.

Gertjan Oskan, a 35-year-old engineer from the Netherlands, was knocked over by a car seven years ago.

His doctors told him on his birthday that he would be paralysed for life. He is now beginning to regain some movement.

Sebastian Tobler, a 48-year-old man from Germany, was a keen cyclist who loved being out in the countryside before he was knocked off his bike.

Now he's back on a specially adapted bike that is powered mostly by his hands - but also partly by his legs.

The researchers believe that their system will improve and restore some movement to people who had lost all hope of walking again.

They plan to begin larger trials in Europe and the US in three years' time.

If these go well, the researchers hope the system could become more widely available.

www.bbc.co.uk 6 November 2018

GPs to prescribe medical cannabis in Jersey

Patients in Jersey will be able to get medical cannabis from all doctors after politicians voted to change the law.

Deputy Montfort Tadier, who proposed the move, said GPs should be allowed to prescribe pre-approved products to patients.

In the UK **only specialist doctors** are allowed to issue similar treatments.

Consultant neurologist Prof Mike Barnes said the mainland should follow the changes, as cannabis expertise was "rare" among medical professionals.

A report **written by Mr Barnes in 2016** on the use of medical cannabis was previously cited by Jersey's government when reviewing its drug laws.

He welcomed the decision, but said he was "concerned" by the current stance in the UK that only specialists were allowed to prescribe.

"It is cannabis expertise that is required and not disease specific expertise," he said.

"I cannot see a logic in restricting prescriptions to hospital consultants, which narrows the pool of expertise, particularly in Jersey."

What did the proposals say?

Deputy Tadier put the plans forward in five sections.

The first four outlined that all medical professionals with the right to prescribe should be permitted to prescribe:

- Cannabis
- Cannabis-derivatives
- Individual Cannabinoids
- Pharmaceutically created cannabis derived products, including dronabinol, epidiolex, nabilone and sativex

The final section called on the island's health minister to bring in changes to the law to allow the plans to come into force by 28 February 2019.

Currently Sativex, a brand of the drug Nabiximols, is the only cannabis-derived medicine prescribed in Jersey.

But Deputy Tadier said the process patients had to go through to be considered for the drug was "a long and arduous one".

Following the debate he said: "We seem to have a states assembly that's relatively open minded... it's a positive step for the island and it means we're leading the way in the British Isles on this subject."

The plans were opposed by the island's Minister for Health and Social Services, Deputy Richard Renouf, who wanted to take "a cautious, step by step approach" to the use of medical cannabis.

www.gov.uk 15 October 2018

Pregabalin and gabapentin to be controlled as class C drugs

New controls over prescription drugs pregabalin and gabapentin following rising fatalities.

Prescription drugs pregabalin and gabapentin are to be reclassified as class C controlled substances from next April, the government announced today (15 October).

Today's move comes after experts highlighted rising numbers of fatalities linked to the drugs. The change means it will be illegal to possess pregabalin and gabapentin without a prescription and it will be illegal to supply or sell them to others.

The drugs, which are used to treat nerve pain, epilepsy and anxiety, can bring about an elevated mood in users but can also have serious side effects, particularly when used in combination with other drugs.

In 2016, the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) raised concerns over medicinal misuse, illegal diversion of the drugs and addiction, and recommended that pregabalin and gabapentin should be controlled as class C Drugs under the Misuse of Drugs Act.

The government accepted the ACMD's advice and launched a public consultation to assess the impact on the healthcare sector. Pharmacies, doctors, pharmaceutical companies and patients responded to the [consultation](#), which has been published today, backing the tighter controls of the drugs under the Misuse of Drugs Regulations.

Regulations implementing the change in law to control the drugs will be laid in Parliament on Wednesday.

Minister for Crime, Safeguarding and Vulnerability Victoria Atkins said:

Any death related to the misuse of drugs is a tragedy. We accepted expert advice and will now change the law to help prevent misuse of pregabalin and gabapentin and addiction to them.

While drug misuse is lower now than it was 10 years ago, we remain committed to reducing it and the harm it causes.

That is why we have published a comprehensive strategy to tackle the illicit drug trade, protect the most vulnerable and help those with drug dependency to recover and turn their lives around.

The law change will mean the drugs are still available for legitimate use on prescription, but there will be stronger controls in place to ensure accountability and minimise the chances of pregabalin and gabapentin falling into the wrong hands or being stockpiled by patients.

Doctors will now need to physically sign prescriptions, rather than electronic copies being accepted by pharmacists. In addition, pharmacists must dispense the drugs within 28 days of the prescription being written.

To ensure that there is enough lead-in time for those in the health care sector to adapt to the new measures, they will come into force in April 2019.

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/ As of 2018, the five tallest buildings in the United States are all located in New York and which other city?
- 2/ Which planet spins fastest, Earth or Jupiter? Jupiter
- 3/ The Pulitzer Prize is best associated with which profession?
- 4/ Which English striker scored six goals at the 2018 World Cup Finals?
- 5/ In which author's work might you find the Bolger, Brandybuck and Gamgee families?
- 6/ Which American rock band composed the song 'Eye of the Tiger', best known for it's association with the Rocky film franchise?
- 7/ Which song topped the UK single chart in July 2018, only to plummet to number 97 one week later
- 8/ Which US President declared: "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country."?
- 9/ Who was the Greek goddess of Love and Beauty?
a) Apollo b) Athena c) Aphrodite
- 10/ Which British actor played Loki in Avengers Assemble and Jonathan Pine in The Night Manager?

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/ Robbie Coltrane 2/ George Alexander Louis 3/ G K Chesterton 4/ George Best (Belfast City Airport) 5/ Paul Merton 6/ £60 7/ Katherine Parr 8/ 15th Century (1564) 9/ Scarlet Pimpernel 10/ Britney Spears