

21<sup>st</sup> March 2022

Ministerial Correspondence and Public Health Enquiries Unit  
Department of Health and Social Care  
39 Victoria Street  
London  
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Dear Maria Caulfield

I am writing in response to your announcement last week that the single fee for HRT will not be implemented until April 2023. I was one of many women who gathered at Westminster last October to hear the government's response to the proposal by Carolyn Harris MP that HRT be made free in England. There was much rejoicing both in Parliament square and on social media at your announcement that HRT would be subject to a single annual fee however, that joy has now turned to frustration, disappointment, and anger. Many, including myself, feel that this was used as an opportunity to grab the headlines that day without providing the vital details.

As you will know from our previous correspondence, and that of my MP Andrea Leadsom to you on my behalf, I am the founder of Menopause Support and the #MakeMenopauseMatter campaign and along with others I have been raising awareness, campaigning, and supporting other women for many years now. It is not overstating the situation to say that Menopause Support has been inundated for months with questions about when the single fee will come into being and women now feel that, yet again, they and their health have been discarded to the bottom of the pile.

Watching your exchange with Carolyn last week I laughed out loud when you declared that women could ask their GP for a 12-month supply of HRT now. I am sorry to say that this shows a complete lack of understanding of what is going on at grassroots level. I am sure that GPs who saw it held their heads in their hands knowing that they did not have the option that you described. Most women feel fortunate to be given a three-month prescription, but many are prescribed one month at a time. Whilst this is frustrating for patients it is also challenging for GPs, many of whom have their hands tied by their practice or CCG who only allow one or three months prescribing at a time.

I would like to know how the single fee for one year's supply of HRT will work. Will women still be able to order 3 months at a time? I ask because even when settled on HRT it is not uncommon for symptoms to change resulting in the need to alter the prescription. The last thing we need is for women to be given 12 months of their current prescription and then waste half of it when things need to change. I know women would also like to know if local oestrogen prescribed for the genitourinary symptoms of menopause will be included in this single fee too?

I am sure that you are aware of the ongoing supply issues particularly for Oestrogel and Estradot patches. This has been going on for many months and women are losing sleep over not being able to access their HRT. It is important to remember that many of these women have had to fight to access HRT in the first place with many being forced into paying for private menopause care at one of the

increasing numbers of private clinics. Many have resorted to paying expensive private fees by putting them on credit cards or borrowing from family. There are of course millions who could never consider private care so are left to suffer in silence, which in 2022 is a disgrace.

Having fought to get HRT the idea of having to chase around town to get the last bottle or packet is causing untold stress and anxiety. Worse is that some feel they have no option but to turn to online pharmacies charging around £30 for a single bottle of Oestrogel. What are the Department of Health and you as minister for patient safety and primary care and the co-chair of the much anticipated menopause task force doing to improve the situation for everybody?

Surely it would be better to make HRT free for all. Whilst this would be a welcome step in the right direction it does not address the heart of the problem which remains education and information. As I have called for many times, we need mandatory menopause education for all GPs and medical students and a public health campaign to inform and educate everybody.

In October 2018 I launched the #MakeMenopauseMatter campaign in Westminster with the help of your co-chair of the menopause taskforce Carolyn Harris MP. Within just nine months we had achieved our aim of having menopause included in the school curriculum in England, thanks to the support of your colleague Rachel Maclean MP. I trust that we can rely on you to ensure that there will be an improvement to GP menopause education and support in the workplace under this government and as a result of the work of the menopause taskforce.

When my MP Andrea Leadsom wrote to you in November requesting you to meet with me you replied to say that you were too busy. I appreciate that there are always calls on your time but hope that you will be able to find the time to meet with me to discuss the issues that myself, many thousands of supporters of the #MakeMenopauseMatter campaign and millions of women around the country feel have been overlooked for far too long.

I look forward to your reply

Yours Sincerely

Diane Danzebrink  
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