

## **PRESS RELEASE**

**Embargoed until 00:01 GMT, Monday 16 March 2009**

### **Harrogate MP to visit locally based charity to discuss prescribing policies**

Phil Willis, MP for Harrogate and Knaresborough, will be visiting the Society for Endocrinology BES 2009 conference in Harrogate on Monday 16 March to show his support for the British Thyroid Foundation's campaign for a review of the present prescribing policies. He has already written to the Secretary of State for Health and also the Chief Executive of the Primary Care Trust to ask them to review this issue. The British Thyroid Foundation is a national charity, based in Harrogate, which provides information and support to people with thyroid disorders.

He will be welcomed by Professor John Wass, Chairman of the Society for Endocrinology and Mrs Janis Hickey, Director of the British Thyroid Foundation (BTF).

On 1 October 2008 Mrs Hickey wrote to the Minister of State for Health to request a review of the effects of the national Primary Care Trusts (PCT) campaign to reduce wastage of medicine, which has resulted in many GP's limiting prescriptions to a 28-day supply. The letter was prompted by a recent survey of its members.

The responses from the 2551 respondents to the BTF survey<sup>[1]</sup> highlighted many inconsistencies in, and dissatisfaction with, prescribing habits: 38% of patients were able to obtain no more than 28-day supplies; 44% were prescribed 56-day supplies; and only 28% were prescribed 84-day (three month) supplies. Some patients were denied a longer supply of levothyroxine when they asked for this.

The results of the BTF survey will be presented as a poster (No: 345; <http://www.endocrine-abstracts.org/ea/0019/ea0019p345.htm>) at the BES Conference on Tuesday 17 March, 12.15 – 13.15 and Wednesday 18 March, 13.00 – 14.00, by Professor Simon Pearce, Professor of Endocrinology at Newcastle University, and Dr Anna Mitchell, Academic Clinical Fellow at Newcastle University.

Mrs Hickey pointed out in her letter that those patients with a lifelong dependency on medication such as levothyroxine are in a different category from patients receiving short-term care, and that the vast majority of hypothyroid patients have an annual blood test and remain on a fixed dose from one year to the next. She also pointed out that increasing a one- or two-month supply to three months could save an estimated £6.5 million a year in dispensing fees as well as saving doctors' and pharmacists' time.

The Department of Health wrote back on 10 October 2008<sup>[2]</sup> declining to take up the issue, stating that there has been no Government directive on the length of prescriptions and that '...it is the responsibility of the local Primary Trust to ensure that adequate controls are in place, and

they may also issue advice to prescribers on repeat prescribing mechanisms, including the length of time for which prescriptions are issued.'

Mrs Hickey said 'This response is very disappointing for members who have written to tell us about the inconvenience of collecting the prescription or having it dispensed monthly having a negative impact on their lives, particularly people who work long hours or shift work, people living in rural areas, the elderly, and those with physical disabilities. It is also awkward for people taking long holidays, or who travel frequently for their work. We have learned of some people running out of supplies because they weren't able to refill their prescription on time; others find the process a constant reminder that they have a health condition.'

The present practice is in direct contradiction to the guidance issued by the National Prescribing Centre in 2000 to Health Authority and Primary Care prescribing advisers<sup>[3]</sup>. This outlined advice on what factors should be taken into account when considering prescription duration and states that:

'Overall, the more medicine that is prescribed at any one time, the more likely it is that some of it will be wasted, especially where patients are taking many medicines, or are less able to manage their medicine stocks effectively. **However, where patients have stable chronic conditions and can manage their stocks of medicine, prescriptions for longer periods may be more suitable, and more convenient for patients.'**

-----Ends-----

#### Notes for editors

#### **References**

[1] 'Your thoughts about 28-day levothyroxine prescribing: - results of the BTF survey' in **BTF News**, issue 65, Summer 2008

[2]'28-day Prescribing – the Response from the Department of Health' in **BTF News**, issue 67, Winter 2008/9

[3]'National Prescribing Centre's Advice: Prescription duration and drug wastage' by Kevin Guinness, Head of the Pharmacy and Prescribing Branch, Department of Health, **Connect, the National Prescribing Centre quarterly newsletter**, issue 20, March 2000.

The British Thyroid Foundation (BTF) is a national charity that works with medical professionals to provide information and support to people with thyroid disorders. For more information please contact Mrs Janis Hickey, Director, British Thyroid Foundation, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, 3 Devonshire Place, Harrogate HG1 4AA or visit the website <http://www.btf-thyroid.org>. Tel: 01423 709707 or 709448, Email: [j.i.hickey@btf-thyroid.org](mailto:j.i.hickey@btf-thyroid.org). Registered Charity Number 1006391

The Society for Endocrinology BES 2009 is Britain's biggest scientific meeting on hormones, and is taking place at the Harrogate International Centre, from 16-19 March 2009. For the full programme, please see <http://www.endocrinology.org/meetings/2009/sfebes2009/prog/prog.aspx>

For more information, please contact the Society for Endocrinology press office:

Jennie Evans, Public & Media Relations Officer, Mobile: +44 (0)7773 797 501, Tel: +44 (0)1454 642 230, Email: [jennie.evans@endocrinology.org](mailto:jennie.evans@endocrinology.org)