July 2020



Thank you for contacting me about arthritis.

I know this can be a very painful, debilitating condition and living with a long-term condition, such as arthritis, has a significant impact upon a person’s wellbeing. So I thank the National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society and Versus Arthritis for raising awareness of this issue.

There are many treatments available that can help “slow” this condition down, including lifestyle changes, medicines and surgery. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence is presently working on updated guidance for treatment of Osteoarthritis, which is due for publication following extensive consultation in 2022. I will continue to monitor this issue and note Versus Arthritis is already registered as a stakeholder in this process**.**

The NHS is being provided with an additional £33.9 billion by 2023/24; this is the largest, longest funding settlement in the history of the NHS. This landmark investment to help secure the long term future of our NHS is extremely welcome, and demonstrates the Government’s commitment to properly funding our NHS and public services: as we have demonstrated over the last few months, health is the Government’s top priority.

Alongside this, the NHS was asked to undertake a clinical review of standards relating to waiting times. This must be clinically led to enable best, and safest, delivery of care for patients. I understand that NHS England has now prepared proposals, covering waiting times across the service, including elective procedures, mental health, cancer, and A&E. The recommendations following this review have been deferred as part of the NHS response to the Covid-19 pandemic, which is understandable.

During this pandemic, it has been important to postpone some NHS activities to protect individuals and enable resources to be used as efficiently as possible. My colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care, as well as NHS Staff, are determined to restart elective procedures as soon as it is safe to do so. On the 27th April, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care announced that, from the following day, NHS services could restart, including the most urgent, like cancer care and mental health support. The exact pace of this restoration is determined by local circumstances, according to local need and demand, and according to the number of coronavirus cases being dealt with by the hospital.

I completely agree that aids and adaptations can greatly enhance the quality of life for people with arthritis – indeed I have seen numerous examples of this for myself. An independent review of the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG), which supports disabled people on low incomes was undertaken in 2018. This review considered how the DFG may need to adapt to changing innovation and technology in the aids and adaptions market and the Department of Health and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government is analysing these recommendations.

Funding for the DFG increased from £220 million in 2015 to 2016 to £431 million in 2017 to 2018, and now stands at £505 million for 2020 to 2021. Clinical guidelines for arthritis currently highlight the importance of self-management, to help patients manage their condition, and live as independently as possible.

The Department for Work and Pensions ensures that people with arthritis applying for Personal Independence Payments are able to specify whether they need specific aids to help them with daily, physical tasks – making sure that they get the right support to improve their quality of life while maintaining their independence.

Between 2014/15 and 2018/19, the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) funded 42 research programmes and individual awards, including doctoral research fellowships and clinical lectureships, on rheumatoid arthritis, with a total value of £18.5m. In addition, in March 2019 the UK Musculoskeletal Translational Research Collaboration launched, a partnership between NIHR and the charity Versus Arthritis. This brings together a range of specialists and research facilities to drive cutting edge research and improve outcomes for patients: rheumatoid arthritis is at the forefront of this work.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me about this important subject.



Yours faithfully,

**CHRIS HEATON-HARRIS MP**

**MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR DAVENTRY**