

PRESS RELEASE

Local health experts and MSPs call for focus on eliminating hepatitis C in Scotland

- **Local health experts and Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) are meeting in Edinburgh to discuss what needs to be done to eliminate hepatitis C in Scotland by 2030**
- **An estimated 36,700 people in Scotland are still thought to have the curable blood borne virus¹ - the highest prevalence in the UK - with a significant number of people affected in prisons²**
- **Meeting outcomes will be submitted to an informal inquiry into hepatitis C elimination, led by the Hepatitis C Parliamentary Champions**

EDINBURGH, UK, 27 June, 2017 - Health experts and Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) are meeting today to discuss how to deliver on Scotland's ambition to eliminate hepatitis C (HCV) by 2030, in line with the World Health Organization's goal.

Scotland has long been at the forefront of international best practice with a comprehensive approach to addressing HCV and has cumulatively treated more of its prevalent population than any other UK nation.³ Even so, there are an estimated 36,700 people in Scotland still thought to have the now curable blood borne virus – the highest prevalence in the UK – and a significant number of those affected are in prisons.²

One strategy to help Scotland achieve its ambition to eliminate HCV - and which is being highlighted at today's meeting - is to focus on people in prison, where an estimated 1 in 5 inmates in Scotland are living with the virus.² Many HCV positive inmates fall out of the healthcare system once released but an innovative scheme in HMP Barlinnie, run by Scotland's leading HCV and HIV charity Waverley Care and funded by global biopharmaceutical company AbbVie, is linking inmates with support services for housing, education and healthcare; supporting them to be able to access treatment for HCV.

Billy Davidson, Waverley Care's Prison Link worker at HMP Barlinnie, explains, "There's a lot that goes into getting people onto and adhering to treatment after they've been diagnosed with hepatitis C in prison. One of the biggest challenges is them falling out of the healthcare system once released. Often it's because they don't have support with practical issues, like finding somewhere to live or getting a job. By working with prisoners to plan for their release, we can make sure the right support is in place and help them to access the treatment that will allow them to clear their hepatitis C and move forward with their lives."

Ivan McKee, Provan SNP MSP, and Chair of today's meeting comments, "Scotland has long been at the forefront of addressing hepatitis C and the Scottish government is committed to playing its part in helping achieve the World Health Organization's goal of eliminating the virus as a public health threat by 2030. To succeed, we need to support and encourage a flexible approach to help NHS Scotland and Health Boards practically drive forward elimination by developing new models of care and improving access to screening, diagnosis and treatment.

To that end, I'm delighted that today's discussions will be submitted to an informal hepatitis C elimination inquiry that is being led by the Hepatitis C Parliamentary Champions. This will help to ensure Scotland's ongoing commitment to addressing HCV in a robust and sustainable way and support those with HCV to clear the virus and move on positively with their lives."

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Notes to Editors

About the Waverley Care Prison Link Scheme

Launched in 2016, this pilot scheme works with prisoners in HMP Barlinnie who are living with hepatitis C. Prior to release, individuals are supported to identify their needs around issues such as housing, finance and healthcare and what support networks will be of help once they leave prison. The project also supports people to talk about issues such as recovery from drug use, which in many cases will be a factor in both their hepatitis C diagnosis and their offending. Following release, people receive ongoing support to start treatment and access the services and support they have identified that will help them make positive changes in their lives.

About Waverley Care

Waverley Care is Scotland's HIV and hepatitis C charity committed to making a positive difference in the lives of people living with or affected by HIV or hepatitis C in Scotland. Its work is focused on prevention, education, testing and support. Throughout Scotland it is reducing new HIV and hepatitis C infections, getting people diagnosed and supporting those affected in whatever ways they need.

www.waverleycare.org

About AbbVie

AbbVie is a global, research-driven biopharmaceutical company committed to developing innovative advanced therapies for some of the world's most complex and critical conditions. The company's mission is to use its expertise, dedicated people and unique approach to innovation to markedly improve treatments across four primary therapeutic areas: immunology, oncology, virology and neuroscience. In more than 75 countries, AbbVie employees are working every day to advance health solutions for people around the world. For more information about AbbVie, please visit us at

www.abbvie.co.uk.

About the Hepatitis C Parliamentary Champions

In 2016, the Hepatitis C Parliamentary Champions group was set up by The Hepatitis C Trust to map out how the elimination of hepatitis C in Scotland can be achieved. Through staging two evidence sessions in the Scottish Parliament and launching a call for written evidence from patients, third sector organisations, the clinical community, health boards, industry and others, the group seeks to identify the practical steps required to ensure that Scotland meets its elimination goal.

Media:

Jasmin Dent, Aurora Communications

+44 (0)20 7148 4177

Jasmin.Dent@auroracomms.com

Sarah Beck, AbbVie

+44 (0)7818 428111

sarah.beck@abbvie.com

Murray Cheek, Waverley Care

+44 (0)131 556 9710

murray.cheek@waverleycare.org

References

¹ Campaigning in Scotland, Hepatitis C Trust. Available at: <http://www.hepctrust.org.uk/campaigning/policy-and-parliamentary/campaigning-scotland> (Date Accessed: June 2017)

² Taylor et al., University of Scotland, University of Bristol and NHS Health England. 2012. Hepatitis C Prevalence and Incidence among Scottish Prisoners and Staff Views of its Management: Final Report. Available at: <http://www.hcvaction.org.uk/resource/hepatitis-c-prevalence-and-incidence-among-scottish-prisoners-and-staff-views-its> (Date Accessed: June 2017)

³ Access and Uptake of Direct Acting Antiviral Medicines, Association of British Pharmaceutical Industry, February 2017. Available at: <http://www.abpi.org.uk/our-work/library/medical-disease/Pages/Access-and-Uptake-of-Direct-Acting-Antiviral-Medicines.aspx> (Date Accessed; June 2017)