Neurology patients ‘betrayed’ by Government, say charities

People with neurological conditions feel ‘thoroughly betrayed’ by the Government, the Neurological Alliance representing 72 charities in the UK have said today (30 April).

The Association of British Neurologists has also commented on the Government’s ‘missed opportunity’ to improve neurology services for millions of people in England.

Faced with damning criticism by two of its own watchdog bodies, the Public Accounts Committee and the National Audit Office, which suggested that billions of pounds of NHS and taxpayers’ money is being wasted on inappropriate, untargeted and unscrutinised spending, one would have thought the Government would take strong measures to right the wrongs that had been exposed.

But a Government response issued this morning makes clear that the Department of Health (DH) has completely ignored calls for a ‘Neurology Tsar’ to help develop a strategy to deliver better services. They have also refused to put sufficient and fair measures or strategies in place to ensure that the NHS and others are effectively meeting the needs of people with neurological conditions. Provision will continue to lag behind cancer, heart and diabetes care, say the Neurological Alliance, where clear strategies and clinical leads have brought many improvements.

Even when Sir David Nicholson, the NHS’s Chief Executive, admitted at the PAC hearing: “I am not in any way suggesting that the services that we provide are adequate.” [3a]. He also commented that clinical leadership like a ‘national clinical tsar’ was “vital” to “make your services happen.” [3b] Yet the Government still have not listened.

"Instead of taking the criticism on the chin and rectifying mistakes, "said Steve Ford, Chair of the Neurological Alliance and Chief Executive of Parkinson's UK, “the DH has chosen to fudge its way out of a corner. Their response issued today is a whitewash - full of 'department spin' and a series of half-truths and massaging of measures and figures to argue their very weak case. This will do very little indeed to improve care services for people with MS, Motor Neurone Disease, Parkinson's or other neurological conditions."

"All the evidence from the Public Accounts Committee and National Audit Office have been dismissed by the DH. People with neurological conditions feel thoroughly betrayed today and can have no confidence that this Government has its interests at heart. The next review is not for three years and this has been a wasted opportunity."

Professor Martin Rossor, President of the Association of British Neurologists commented:

"We are disappointed that the Government has not committed to establishing neurology clinical networks that would provide comprehensive coverage across the country. This is a missed opportunity that would have brought clinicians together to make real progress on improving patient care, spending money more efficiently and mitigating service variation."

Arlene Wilkie, Chief Executive of the Neurological Alliance said:
“The Government has totally ignored the warning of its own spending watchdog that a national leader is needed to take control and avert this crisis of care for people with neurological conditions.

“Without a dedicated lead to push forward the vital improvements required to deliver high-quality care, neurology services will continue to lag behind those for other conditions and fail patients.”

The Public Accounts Committee with review services for people with neurological conditions again in three years time.

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Notes to the editor

1. For more information, case studies and interviews with spokespeople, contact the Parkinson’s UK press office Laura Carpenter: 020 7963 9311, lcarpenter@parkinsons.org.uk, 07961 460 248.

2. There are currently two million people with neurological conditions (excluding migraine). £2.9bn spent on services for them in 2009-10.

3. The Government response can be found in full on the Treasury website - Seventy Second Report Department of Health (DH) Services for people with neurological conditions http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/hmt_minutes_68_70_72_reports_cpas_apr2012.pdf

3a) In response to Q68 http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmpubacc/1759/120118.htm

3b) In response to Q103 http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmpubacc/1759/120118.htm

4. The response from the Government is to the Public Accounts Committee reports on services for people with neurological conditions in March 2012 http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/public-accounts-committee/news/neuro-report/-

5. This followed a hearing held by the Public Accounts Committee at which evidence was given by Steve Ford and Sir David Nicholson


7. The Neurological Alliance is the only collective voice for 8 million children, young people and adults in England with a neurological condition. The Neurological Alliance is a membership organisation of 74 national and regional brain and spine organisations, please visit www.neural.org.uk for more information

8. The MND Association is the only national organisation in England, Wales and Northern Ireland dedicated to the support of people with MND and those who care for them. The Association also funds and promotes research to understand what causes MND, how to diagnose it and, most importantly, how to effectively treat it so that it no longer devastates lives.

9. Parkinson’s UK is the Parkinson’s support and research charity. Every hour, someone in the UK is told they have Parkinson’s. We bring people with Parkinson’s, their carers and families together via our network of local groups, our website and
free confidential helpline. Specialist nurses, our supporters and staff provide information and training on every aspect of Parkinson's. As the UK's Parkinson's support and research charity we're leading the work to find a cure, and we're closer than ever. We also campaign to change attitudes and demand better services.

10. The **MS Society** is the UK’s largest charity dedicated to supporting everyone whose life is touched by multiple sclerosis (MS), funding around 70 vital research projects, providing an award-winning free phone helpline (0808 800 8000), investing in MS specialists and giving grants.

11. The **Association of British Neurologists** was founded in 1932. The aim of the Association of British Neurologists is to improve the health and well-being of people with neurological disorders by advancing the knowledge and practice of neurology in the British Isles. For more information visit: [http://www.abn.org.uk](http://www.abn.org.uk)