



Department  
of Health &  
Social Care

*From Helen Whately MP  
Minister of State for Care*

*39 Victoria Street  
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13 August 2021

Iain Stewart MP

By email to: [iain.stewart.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:iain.stewart.mp@parliament.uk)

Dear Iain,

Thank you for your correspondence of 10 August on behalf of a number of your constituents about Versus Arthritis' Joint Replacement Support Package campaign.

Because of the unprecedented situation caused by the coronavirus pandemic, I am not able to reply to every individual letter, personally.

This is not what I would wish; however, in order to prevent delay to you, I have asked the department's Deputy Director of Strategy to respond on my behalf, and his reply is enclosed.

I hope Mr Richardson's reply is helpful.

Kind regards,

**HELEN WHATELY**



Department  
of Health &  
Social Care

*From the Deputy Director for Ministers, Accountability & Strategy  
Department of Health and Social Care*

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London  
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Iain Stewart MP

By email to: [iain.stewart.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:iain.stewart.mp@parliament.uk)

Dear Mr Stewart,

Thank you for your correspondence of 10 August on behalf of a number of your constituents about Versus Arthritis' Joint Replacement Support Package campaign. I have been asked to reply.

As your constituents will be aware, COVID-19 has exerted an unprecedented strain on the NHS, but it has worked incredibly hard to keep services going throughout this pandemic. At the peak of the pandemic, the Government focused on caring for COVID-19 patients, while still prioritising urgent treatments such as surgery for cancer and other life-saving operations.

The Government recognises that this resulted in a large number of cancelled and postponed appointments and procedures, including for patients waiting for joint-replacement surgery and treatment for arthritis. The Government also recognises that the postponement of procedures has affected patients' quality of life, ability to work and independence. It is a priority of this department, and of the Government, to work with the NHS to tackle waiting lists and reduce waiting times.

Thanks to the hard work of NHS staff, in April 1.8 million diagnostics tests were completed and 1.1 million patients began their treatment. The number of patients waiting for 52 weeks for trauma and orthopaedic operations, which include joint-replacement surgeries, was over 11,000 less in April than in March.

The Government will continue to support the NHS to carry out the maximum possible amount of elective procedures. Between March and September, the NHS will receive £6.6billion to support the recovery of elective services, continuing funding for the hospital discharge programme, infection control measures, long-COVID services, and NHS staff support services. To help increase activity levels, the Government has made £1billion accessible to providers through the Elective Recovery Fund for 2021/22.

In May, NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSE&I) also launched a £160million initiative to tackle growing waiting lists, and a network of 'accelerator' areas have been established to pilot new initiatives, including extra clinics at weekends. The Government is now working with NHSE&I to support longer-term elective recovery, including encouraging transformation to improve productivity and ensuring continued access to the independent sector to help meet patient demand.

Innovation and the use of technology will play a central part in the recovery of joint-replacement surgery. The Government is prioritising these surgeries to help improve and speed up joint-replacement activity across the NHS, through the High Volume Low Complexity and Getting It Right First Time programmes. Hospitals throughout England, including Queen's Hospital (Romford), the Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre (Oxford) and United Lincolnshire Hospitals and Royal Cornwall Hospitals NHS Trusts, have already demonstrated some great examples of innovation and the use of technology in joint replacements.

Patients should have access to a range of support so that they have the help, care and information they need. The NHS is working hard both locally and nationally to ensure that patients are informed about changes to their care. Patients whose care has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic will be contacted by either their local NHS trust or their GP practice, and will receive information on how their care will be proceeding and who they should contact.

NHSE&I is working with its COVID-19 musculoskeletal (MSK) stakeholder group to assess the impact of lockdown on the physical and mental health of those with MSK conditions such as arthritis. Through this, a self-management resource has been developed for patients with arthritis, to help manage both the physical and mental health implications of their condition at home during the COVID-19 pandemic. This can be found at [www.csp.org.uk/conditions/managing-pain-home](http://www.csp.org.uk/conditions/managing-pain-home).

NHSE&I has also been working with Versus Arthritis through the Best MSK Health, Elective Care and Personalised Care programmes to develop optimal patient communication and support strategies for physical and mental health.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Richardson', with a long, sweeping underline.

**Paul Richardson**  
**Deputy Director**  
**Ministers, Accountability & Strategy**