

WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Medical care for veterans

Monday 11 January 2010

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mike O'Brien): The Government is committed to ensuring that those who are seriously injured or who develop mental health problems whilst in the service of their country will receive the best possible care from the National Health Service for the rest of their lives.

The Department is today announcing a package of measures to support service personnel who have received serious injuries whilst on active service. I have worked closely with my hon Friend the Minister for Veterans (Kevan Jones) to put in place new arrangements with the Ministry of Defence for life care planning, together with a guarantee that all those seriously injured will receive an early and comprehensive assessment of their long term needs. It is intended that those needing continuing healthcare they will receive high quality care for life based on a regular review of their needs overseen by an NHS case manager.

As committed in New Horizons - a cross-government vision for Mental Health, the Department is also responding to concerns expressed about the impact of recent and current deployments on the mental health of those in and those leaving the armed forces. The community mental health services currently being piloted in six mental health trusts are expected to continue their work beyond the end of the pilot period. The findings from the evaluation of these pilots will allow other mental health services to gear their services towards meeting the needs of veterans. We expect that all mental health services will make special provision for veterans during 2011-12.

In addition, we are providing grant funding for Combat Stress to work directly with mental health trusts to ensure that the services they provide are accessible to and appropriate for military veterans. The two Departments have today signed a tripartite agreement to facilitate the work that Combat Stress will be doing in partnership with the Government. The Department will also be extending its Third Sector Strategic Partner Programme with the third sector to include the involvement of charities representing those in the armed forces, their families and veterans.

The major improvements in trauma care made in recent years by Defence Medical Services and the excellent work of the emergency teams in Afghanistan means that people are now surviving injuries which would have taken their lives in former times. The Department has previously undertaken to ensure that recent Service leavers who have lost a limb while serving will – where clinically appropriate

- be entitled to receive from the NHS an equivalent standard of prosthetic limb to those provided by Defence Medical Services.

Today I can announce that this undertaking will be extended to all veterans who have lost a limb whilst serving, where clinically appropriate.

The Department will also ensure that a responsible Director within strategic health authorities, together with primary care trust champions for the armed forces are identified to advocate for them and to ensure that their needs are fully reflected in commissioning plans and service provision.

The Department will also be working with the Ministry of Defence to ensure an improved transfer of medical records to the NHS on retirement from the Armed Forces. This will facilitate GP awareness of the veteran status of new patients to ensure veterans receive their entitlement to priority treatment for any injuries or illness attributable to their time serving in the Armed Forces.

Finally, the Department is working with the military to develop clearer and easier routes into accredited NHS jobs to provide employment opportunities for those leaving the armed forces.