**BSACI / NASG Response to the Government’s Fit for the Future: NHS 10-Year Health Plan**

The British Society for Allergy and Clinical Immunology (BSACI) and the National Allergy Strategy Group (NASG), representing Allergy UK, Anaphylaxis UK and the Natasha Allergy Research Foundation, welcome the Government’s 10-Year Health Plan. We recognise the need for change and agree with the underlying principles. We are, however, disappointed that allergy services are not mentioned, despite our ongoing evidence and collective input into the consultation and especially after earlier reporting on the progress of the consultation has specifically acknowledged that allergy services need improvement (The Times, Feb 15).

The 10-Year Plan promises care based on need and aims to reduce *health inequalities*. Yet, the UK, where at least 1 in 20 of the population suffers from allergies,1 still lacks adequate services, trained professionals, and access to treatment. If the 10-Year Plan is truly focused on being fit for the future through prevention, integrated care services and digital innovation, then the Government must address the severe disparities in allergy care.

We have long advised that better *community-based allergy care*, including GPs and other professionals trained in allergy, can improve patient outcomes, accurate referrals to secondary care, and reduce hospital admissions. Hospital admissions for anaphylaxis tripled between 1998 and 2018.2 So, we support improved care in the community and welcome the announcements on restoring GP access and on developing novel advanced practice models of care. We also welcome the announcement of 1,000 new specialty posts: improvement in community-based allergy care must be backed by robust specialist allergy services in secondary care. The 10-Year Plan promotes a NHS workforce fit for the future with improved training. We look forward to seeing more detail on the proposed changes to community care, on the allocation of the new specialty posts and to working with the Government to ensure that these changes will create an allergy workforce that is fit for the future.

We support investment in digital health and data-driven decision-making. National allergy datasets are essential for planning and delivering effective services which provide equal access to allergy care for patients. The BSACI Immunotherapy Registry reveals stark geographical variations in access to specialist allergy services and the health inequalities that this creates, underscoring the need for more professionals in both primary and secondary care who are trained in allergy.3 We encourage the Government to invest in this registry, and other important registries developed by the speciality to gather data on allergic disease, to inform improvements in efficiencies and equal access to care and treatment to prevent allergy.

We support the 10-Year Plan’s focus on prevention. In the UK there has been a trebling in the prevalence of allergic rhinitis and eczema since the 1970s.4 A 2004 study showed 39% of children and 30% of adults had allergies, highlighting the “allergy epidemic” in the UK.5 Between 2008 and 2018, there has been a doubling of the prevalence of food allergy.6 Improving health literacy and early intervention can reduce the risk of allergy developing as well as avoid exacerbations of ill-health. Access to treatments such as immunotherapy can reduce symptoms; help prevent new allergies and can also support patients to control their allergies by preventing the allergic response that triggers symptoms.

We support the statements recognising those with complex health needs and on the complexities of navigating siloed services. Improving joined up healthcare for patients with multisystem allergy requires investment in both primary and secondary care allergy services. Most patients with allergy with suffer with another related allergic comorbidity so fragmented and inefficient care is common or these patients.

The Government is aware that NASG is working with stakeholders, including the Department of Health and Social Care, on a 10-Year National Allergy Strategy. The NAS aligns strongly with the 10-year plan in multiple areas, and we have heard directly from Minister Dalton that she is keen to engage directly around this. Although this was not mentioned in the 10-Year Plan, we remain committed to raising awareness and improving allergy care across the UK. We urge the Government to adopt a fit for the future model of care for allergy services.

We acknowledge the difficult challenges that the NHS faces, and we urge the Government to engage further and ensure the outcomes of the National Allergy Strategy are integrated into the NHS 10-Year Plan to ensure allergy services are truly fit for the future.

 

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References

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