A Follow-up to "Concerns about the RSM Conference"

Margaret Williams 25th April 2008

Further information has come to light that is relevant to "Concerns about the RSM Conference on 28th April 2008 on 'CFS' " (http://www.meactionuk.org.uk/RSM_Conference_April_2008.htm).

On 24th April 2008 a meeting entitled "The future of regulating health professionals – the patient's perspective" was held at Avonmouth House, 6, Avonmouth Street, London SE1 6NX under the auspices of The Council for Healthcare Regulatory Excellence in conjunction with the Department of Health.

The UK Chief Medical Officer (CMO), Professor Sir Liam Donaldson, made what may be an important announcement. He referred to the matter that was mentioned in "Concerns about the RSM Conference", namely the issue of clinical standards: he made it plain that the Scottish Government's development of clinical standards is a pilot scheme and – importantly -- he said that it will be extended to all parts of the United Kingdom.

The CMO did not mention "CFS/ME", nor was it mentioned by anyone else on the platform, but it was brought up in the Working Group session.

Given that the Scottish Government now recognises "CFS/ME" as being a chronic neurological disorder under the auspices of the Long Term Conditions Unit and is working on clinical standards for neurological conditions, including access to investigations by neurologists, it may be expected that when the Scottish "clinical standards" are implemented throughout the UK, the rest of the UK will also recognise "CFS/ME" as a neurological Long Term Condition.

After all, this would be in accordance with the UK's inclusion of "CFS/ME" in the National Service Framework (NSF) as a neurological disorder: the NSF for people with long-term neurological conditions was launched by the UK Department of Health on 10th March 2005 and it specifically includes people with ME/CFS. This has been confirmed more than once: see for example, Hansard for 6th March 2006 (HC column 1200W), where the then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Health, Liam Byrne MP, stated categorically: "*The NSF sets out a clear vision of how health and social care organisations can improve the quality, consistency and responsiveness of their services and help improve the lives of people with neurological conditions, **including CFS/ME***".

Those exact words were reiterated on 12th May 2006 by Ivan Lewis MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary at The Department of Health, and he added: "*Those most severely affected by CFS/ME have access to the full range of health and social service support as outlined in the national service framework for long-term conditions*" (Hansard, 12th May 2006).

Sadly, such promises remain empty. Indeed, they may continue to remain empty because the aim of the RSM conference on 28th April seems intended to “educate” GPs that ME does not exist and that “CFS” is a behavioural disorder that should be managed by the recommendations for psychotherapy that are set out in the NICE Guideline.

It remains to be explained how the same neurological condition that is included in the NSF can be deemed by the psychiatrists who will be speaking at the RSM conference to be a mental health disorder and how, together with the Guideline Development Group who produced the NICE Guideline, those who planned the RSM conference (described by Mr Ian Balmer, Chief Executive of the RSM, as a *“broad-based academic planning group”*) can so resolutely ignore the fact that “CFS/ME” is already included in the NSF as a long-term neurological disorder.

The matter is now so serious that the High Court has ordered a full day’s hearing to determine permission to proceed to Judicial Review. This is an exceptionally long hearing for permission, which is usually only half an hour. Perhaps the RSM should take note.