



From the Director-General

21 November 2016

The Countess of Mar
House of Lords
London
SW1A 0PW

Via email: marm@parliament.uk

Dear Lady Mar,

Thank you for getting in touch.

I have shared your letter with Carol Rubra, BBC Assignment Editor, Health and Science. Please find her response enclosed.

I hope this goes some way to addressing your concerns.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Tony Hall'.

Tony Hall
Director-General



The Countess of Mar,
House of Lords
London SW1A 0AA

November 21st, 2016

Dear Lady Mar,

Thank you for your letter of November 3rd about a randomised controlled trial comparing two treatments for children with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome/Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (CFS/ME) which was covered by BBC News and the *Today* programme on November 1st. The study will investigate whether FITNET-NHS (online CBT) is effective in the NHS, and whether it offers value for money compared to Activity Management.

This is the largest clinical trial of an intervention in CFS/ME and is being directly funded by the National Institutes of Health Research (the research wing of the National Health Service). In my judgment this made it a significant story. The Association of Young People with ME – a charity that represents children with the disease – and the UK's Medical Research Council both say there has been a lack of attention given to CFS/ME and that this trial is needed.

We are aware that research about CFS has been controversial and we try to ensure that this is reflected in our coverage. The BBC has reported a broad range of CFS/ME research – including this on striving to find a biological cause (www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-31644618), the difficulties along the way (www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-15017660), the threats sent to people researching the field (www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-14326514) and why discussing the disease has become so heated (www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-14883651).

I accept that the original headline for the article by James Gallagher which referred to people being 'cured' was incorrect. In fact it was published in error and was corrected very shortly after the original version was first posted.

As regards your comments about the interview with Professor Esther Crawley on the *Today* programme, the Editors have given me this response:

"We interviewed Esther Crawley on the 1st November in her capacity as the lead researcher in the FITNET-NHS trial that was being launched that day. The focus of the interview was the trial itself (the largest clinical trial into a treatment for CFS ever undertaken) not the row about whether CFS/ME is a psychological condition or whether psychological therapies are an appropriate treatment, and not the parallel row about whether the PACE trial into the use of psychological therapies in adults has been discredited or not.

However because of the long running controversy surrounding the issue we decided to make reference to it by including a clip of Jane Colby from the Tymes Trust (one of the charities that objects to the classification of CFS/ME as a psychological condition and the use of psychological therapies). We might have substituted Jane Colby's contribution

for someone from the ME Association, but they would have made very much the same point."

I note that you allege that Professor Crawley is under investigation by the General Medical Council. We have contacted the GMC who do not confirm this. We understand that no limits have been placed on her licence to practice.

I also note your concerns that the FITNET study could be instrumental in the forcible removal of children from their parents, as a result of applications by Social Service departments. However this study is not expected to report until 2022. It would seem unlikely that any interim findings would be admissible in court proceedings.

Finally I would like to reassure you over the relations between the Science Media Centre and BBC News. The SMC is a valuable resource for advice on matters requiring expert understanding but it does not condition our journalism. BBC science and health journalists always check directly with the researchers involved in the reports they cover. Their journalism is independent and impartial, in keeping with the BBC's Editorial guidelines.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carol Rubra', written in a cursive style.

Carol Rubra
Assignment Editor, Health, Science and Environment, BBC News