



Department
of Health

From the Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
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The Rt Hon George Howarth MP
By email to: george.howarth.mp@parliament.uk

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Dear George,

Thank you for your email of 15 November on behalf of a number of your constituents about the availability of bisphosphonates for preventing secondary breast cancer in England.

I appreciate your constituents' concerns and the strength of feeling about this matter.

I want to assure your constituents that this Government is committed to continuing to improve cancer services for all in this country and our desire is to see NHS patients being able to benefit from the latest available products and treatments. Breast cancer is a terrible disease and I fully appreciate the devastating effect it has on patients and those close to them, and how important it is for such patients to have access to the most effective treatments.

It may help if I begin by explaining that although bisphosphonates are not licensed for the prevention of secondary breast cancer, there is nothing to stop clinicians prescribing them 'off-label'. There is no funding, legal or regulatory barrier to prescribing drugs off-label if the clinician considers them to be clinically appropriate for an individual patient. Prescribing in this way is part and parcel of normal everyday clinical practice and offers benefits to a great number of patients.

We are already working hard to explore the application of repurposed drugs like bisphosphonates, but decisions on their funding for the prevention of secondary breast cancer are currently made locally and it is right that such decisions are taken by local clinicians who are best placed to understand local needs.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) is currently updating its guideline on the diagnosis and management of early and locally advanced breast cancer, and the use of adjuvant bisphosphonates will be considered as part of the

update. NICE expects to publish its further guidance in July 2018 and further information is available at www.nice.org.uk, by searching for 'NG10016'.

I hope this information reassures your constituents that action is underway to increase the availability of repurposed drugs like bisphosphonates.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeremy Hunt', with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

JEREMY HUNT