



Health Committee

House of Commons London SW1A 0AA
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From Dr Sarah Wollaston MP, Chair

Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

Letter by email to healthsofs@dh.gsi.gov.uk

22 January 2018

Dear Jeremy

I write following recent press reports concerning the practices of referral agents in the addiction rehabilitation industry.

I understand that the practice has grown up of setting up helplines which earn money through referral fees for passing patients on to private rehabilitation clinics. I have been concerned to learn that large sums of money are being earned through these fees, but that the websites which provide them are not required to disclose the fact that they are paid by clinics for making referrals.

I was pleased to learn that Google has now ceased receiving payments from referral agents for promoting them in web searches. I nevertheless remain concerned about the practices which have been exposed by the recent press investigations. I would be grateful to know what the Government's view is of the practice of "patient brokering", and what action it is considering to tackle the issue.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah Wollaston".

Dr Sarah Wollaston MP
Chair of the Committee



Department
of Health

*From the Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care*

*39 Victoria Street
London
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020 7210 4850

POC_1119210

Dr Sarah Wollaston MP
Chair, Health Select Committee
House of Commons
Westminster
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21 MAR 2018

Dear Sarah,

Thank you for your letter of 22 January regarding the issue of referral agents in the addiction rehabilitation industry. Please accept my apologies for the delay in responding to you.

It is important to begin by emphasising that local authority commissioned alcohol and drug treatment is free, and that people in need do not have to pay for expensive private treatment at the sort of places the referral agencies send patients. It is unfortunate that when people search for alcohol and drug treatment, Google often listed these referral agencies high on the search page, but it looks like this practice has largely stopped now.

When the Sunday Times story broke in January, we contacted local authorities via Public Health England's (PHE) regional centre teams to alert each local area to these unethical practices and to advise them to remove any links to these agencies from their own websites.

Alcohol and drug treatment is available in every local area in England. People looking for help with alcohol or drug misuse problems can access it via their General Practitioner and/or self-refer to their local specialist treatment services. Waiting times are short – the average is under three days for all treatment types – and most people can access treatment quickly. Information about free local services is available by searching the FRANK website (www.talktofrank.com) and NHS Choices.

PHE continues to work with local authorities to help them provide effective drug and alcohol prevention and treatment services; based on local need and we will continue to support good quality local alcohol and drug treatment that is free and accessible to all.

Yes
Jeremy

JEREMY HUNT



Health and Social Care Committee

House of Commons London SW1A 0AA

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From Dr Sarah Wollaston MP, Chair

Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

Letter by email to healthsofs@dh.gsi.gov.uk

12 April 2018

Dear Jeremy

Thank you for your reply of 21 March to my letter concerning referral agents in the addiction rehabilitation industry.

I was pleased to see your reiteration of the point that local authority commissioned alcohol and drug treatment is free, and that people in need do not have to pay for expensive private treatment at the sort of places the referral agencies send patients. I was also pleased to see that your Department had contacted local authorities to advise them to remove any links to such agencies from their websites—though I have been concerned to hear from a correspondent that the removal of those links does not yet seem to have happened.

I am writing now to invite you to respond to one question in my letter which was not explicitly addressed in your reply. **What is the Government's view of the practice of "patient brokering"?**

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah Wollaston".

Dr Sarah Wollaston MP
Chair of the Committee



Department
of Health &
Social Care

From the Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

39 Victoria Street
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POC_1135511

Dr Sarah Wollaston MP
Chair, Health and Social Care Committee
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26 JUN 2018

Dear Sarah,

Thank you for your letter of 12 April regarding referral agents in the addiction rehabilitation industry which was a follow up letter to my letter to you dated 21 March. I apologise if my letter did not sufficiently address the “patient brokering” point in your original letter.

You asked what the Government’s view was of the practice of “patient brokering”. The Government does not agree with any unethical practice. I understand that Google has now removed the advertisements that were guilty of this practice and now internet searches for addiction advice take the user to a list of options, the top option being the NHS Choices website. The NHS Choices website provides users with information on NHS treatment services available in their area. These treatments, as I mentioned in my previous letter, are local authority commissioned, designed to meet the needs of their local populations and are free. Individuals can speak to their GP about access to these services to suit their specific needs or, alternatively, through a local specialist treatment service.

Following Public Health England’s regional centre teams alerting local authorities to this unethical practice they continue to remain vigilant.

Yes
JH

JEREMY HUNT