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Dee Debbie

Thank you for your letter of 7 June to Andrew Lansley on behalf of a number of your constituents about benzodiazepines. I am replying as the Minister responsible for drug treatment policy.

The national drug strategy sets a clear ambition to address all drugs of dependency and this includes prescription and over-the-counter medicines. It states that recovery involves three overarching principles:

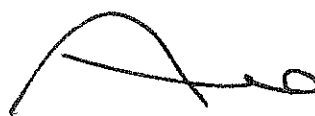
- wellbeing;
- citizenship; and
- freedom from dependence.

It is clear that recovery is an individual, person-centred journey, as opposed to an end state, and one that will mean different things to different people. People who develop problems with prescription or over-the-counter medicines may have very different needs from someone who has a problem with illegal drugs, and the drug strategy makes it clear that local areas must take account of the diverse needs of their community when commissioning services.

I asked that the National Addiction Centre and National Treatment Agency reports on addiction to medicine and the level of current service provision be peer reviewed. This was to ensure that they were authoritative and provided a sound basis for future discussions. I am grateful to Professor Heather Ashton for her careful consideration of the reports. Her comments are most constructive and have been relayed to the researchers.

I presented the findings of the reports to a joint meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Groups on Drug Misuse and Involuntary Tranquilliser Addiction on 14 June. This provided a valuable opportunity to discuss with key organisations and individuals the action that can be taken to help prevent addiction to prescription and over-the-counter medicines and to improve services for those who become dependent.

I welcome your interest and look forward to your continued support of this important area of health policy and service development. Please do contact me again if there are any further concerns.

A handwritten signature in black ink that appears to read "Red" followed by some illegible scribbles.A handwritten signature in black ink that appears to read "Anne Milton" with a stylized flourish.

ANNE MILTON