

P-05-960 Fund the funeral costs of all NHS staff who die from or with Covid-19, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 09.03.21

Dear the Petitions committee

I write once again to challenge the minister's reluctance to fund the funerals of NHS staff who die as a result of covid during the pandemic. I have addressed many of the issues in the many previous submissions and remind the committee, once more, that this issue arose following a friend dying of covid whilst working as a nurse in Cardiff and her family having to run a Crowdfunder to cover the cost of the funeral. This is not the Wales that I want to live in and that is why with my co-petitioners we brought this to the Welsh government nearly a year ago. I have addressed many of the minister's issues in the past but I will address the three from his letter of 5th March below.

1. The minister claims it would be difficult to identify NHS workers for the administration of the scheme. It seems likely that all NHS staff will have a payroll number. This is something that we have suggested could be managed through the funeral parlours who could request this information from anyone wishing to take up the scheme. They could then act as a single point of contact for confirmation. Alternatively given that the government is funding a specific life assurance payment to NHS staff (Nursing Times link below) announced by government in April 2020 it seems that the government is able to identify people who are eligible, and that process should be matched.
2. I am sure that both the petitioners and the petition committee would welcome an extension of the scheme beyond simply NHS staff to other frontline care workers. It may help to address the first point to ensure that all health and social care workers who provide publicly funded hands-on care for people who have contracted COVID-19 or work in settings where the virus is present are eligible for this money. This would bring the scheme in line with the life assurance scheme and therefore make it perfectly simple to identify the same cohort who would be made eligible by the scheme. It does not make sense to argue that no one can have anything because someone else hasn't had it, we would never make progress if society followed this rule. The government life insurance scheme has made it clear that we recognise the above and beyond the effort being made by our healthcare staff in the pandemic and whilst I would not personally mind it being extended far wider the minister's other concerns with the practicality of the scheme would suggest that matching the eligibility to the government's life assurance scheme would reduce some of his administrative concerns.

3. The minister states that the time frame for setting up the scheme is 'many weeks/months' yet this petition has been with the Welsh Government for many months so the time frame problems appeared to be entirely of the minister's own making. Retrospective reimbursement may be problematic but is not as problematic as the family of a nurse who has died of covid desperately trying to find money to pay for a funeral. It seems egregious for the minister to use the 'it'll take a long time' argument having been responsible for many iterations of this petition without resolution.

I therefore recommend the petitions committee take this to the floor of the Senedd or directly to Mark Drakeford for decision. I think it's time for leaders in the Welsh assembly to make it clear whether they think that we the taxpayers should or should not pay for the cost of funerals for health care workers who have died as a result of covid in the pandemic. To continue to run down the clock on this petition does not reflect well on those involved. If providing a few 1000 pounds it's too much to ask then say so. If it's possible to fund grant schemes for other aspects of the pandemic it's possible to do so for NHS staff. This is simply a question of priorities and the choices that our representatives are making . As the elections fast approach it seems sensible that our representatives make that decision and defend it at the ballot.

Jane Henderson

On behalf of the petitioners

<https://www.nursingtimes.net/news/coronavirus/government-will-pay-60000-to-families-of-nurses-who-die-in-service-28-04-2020/>