



GOVERNMENT PLEDGE FOR MORE ME/CFS RESEARCH

Unpaid carers are the missing piece in treatment guidelines and research priorities for ME/CFS

Siobhan O'Dwyer,¹ Sarah Boothby,² Georgia Smith,¹ Lucy Biddle,³ Nina Muirhead,⁴ Sharmila Khot⁵

The recent publication of an all party parliamentary group report,^{1,2} a National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guideline,³ and new research priorities⁴ heralds a dramatic shift in approaches and attitudes to myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome (ME/CFS) in the UK.

Largely ignored in all three publications, however, are unpaid carers (known outside the UK as family carers or caregivers). Most people with ME/CFS rely on their families for care, and many of those families have been the driving force behind the changes to research and treatment that are now unfolding. There has been limited research on unpaid care in the specific context of ME/CFS, but the few existing studies clearly show that the usual toll of caring for a sick or disabled family member is compounded by the historic prejudice around ME/CFS and the absence of evidence based treatments.⁵⁻⁸

Although we applaud the commitment of NICE, the all party parliamentary group, and the ME/CFS Priority Setting Partnership, it might still be decades before biomedical breakthroughs are made or translated into effective, widely available treatments for ME/CFS.⁹ In the meantime, families will continue to provide the majority of care for people with ME/CFS and bear the physical, psychological, and economic scars of doing so.

The new NICE guideline does recommend support for carers, but the supports it recommends are generic. They will do little to tackle the unique needs of ME/CFS carers or their systemic mistreatment by health and social care professionals.

A change in the UK's approach to ME/CFS is long overdue, but without a focus on unpaid carers the puzzle will always be missing a piece. The wellbeing of carers must also be a priority in ME/CFS research, and effective strategies must be developed to tackle their needs and recognise and respect their expertise, in clinical practice and social care.

NM is also director of Doctors With ME; SK is also clinical research fellow at Cardiff University.

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Full response at: <https://www.bmj.com/content/377/bmj.o1341/r>.

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¹ University of Exeter Medical School, Exeter, UK

² Exeter, UK

³ Bristol Medical School, Bristol, UK

⁴ Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust, Amersham, UK

⁵ Cardiff and Vale University Health Board, Cardiff, UK

s.odwyer@exeter.ac.uk

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