



A PATIENT CAMPAIGNING GROUP

Oct 20, 2022

### **UK government privatises Covid response and forces vulnerable immunocompromised patients to pay for Covid drugs**

- The Department of Health in the United Kingdom has privatised the provision of lifesaving Covid drugs, forcing the most vulnerable patients into financial precarity.
- The government has refused to make AstraZeneca's preventative antibody therapy, Evusheld, available on the NHS this winter, despite its use in 32 other countries (and all other G7 nations). Yesterday, AstraZeneca announced the private availability of the drug.
- Access to the drug in the private healthcare sector will introduce vast new health inequalities with only the most wealthy being able to gain access to COVID-19 preventative antibody treatments this Winter.
- Evusheld is a combination of two long-acting antibodies (tixagevimab and cilgavimab). It is a drug designed to protect clinically vulnerable people against Covid in cases where vaccines are not or much less effective. This includes people who have cancer, organ transplants, renal disease, autoimmune disease, and primary immunodeficiencies, among many others. It includes those who are on immunosuppressants like chemotherapy drugs like rituximab or steroids. Evusheld is given prophylactically (as a preventative) to stop people in this situation developing severe Covid in the first place.
- Evusheld for the UK is a patient campaigning group with over 2,000 immunocompromised patient members in the United Kingdom. It exists to get this drug introduced in the UK with access for all those who need it.
- "Our campaign is unchanged by this development", said Martin Eve, a leader of the Evusheld for the UK campaign. "As we have stated from the outset, we exist for one purpose: 'to get this drug introduced in the UK with access for all those who need it by Christmas. This includes roll out to all vulnerable people who are less likely to have

mounted a response to vaccination'. We continue to believe that the only equitable route is via full NHS availability, free at the point of use. It is disgusting to see a situation where only those with wealth can have access to health. **This is another step towards the privatisation of COVID care and the healthcare system.**"

- Nikola Bridgen, also of Evusheld for the UK, stressed the damage that the government has done: "Desperate patients are saying that they will take out loans and new credit cards, simply so that they can get some safety. But they can't afford this. Some of our members have been suicidal. Others are severely upset at the injustice of this. They have paid their taxes, served their country in the military, taught in our schools, and worked in our fire brigades. We went to fight against COVID together in 2020. Now we will ask the most vulnerable to pay to protect themselves as we no longer seem to care."
- Mark Oakley of Evusheld for the UK stated "The gaping hole left by the government is inconceivable. Whilst the DHSC flounders in the shadow of the other countries already protecting their own vulnerable populations, patients in the UK face the stark reality of paying to get some protection and freedom, or choosing to pay other mounting household costs. The government and DHSC needs to wake up and rectify this situation by Christmas."
- Medical experts were also shocked by the development. "Health and protection from Covid should not be determined by how much money you earn", said Dr Lennard Lee of Oxford University and clinical champion for the immunocompromised. "I am hearing from patients on the breadline telling me what they will sacrifice to get this treatment privately. Prophylactic antibody therapies like Evusheld should be made available to everyone, not just the most wealthy."

ENDS

Contact:-

Prof Martin Eve, Evusheld for the UK: martin@eve.gd

Mark Oakley, Evusheld for the UK: mark@finewoodendesigns.com

Nikola Bridgen, Evusheld for the UK: nikolabridgen@icloud.com

Available for interview/comment request

Dr Lennard YW Lee; lennard.lee@oncology.ac.uk

## Background information

- The #Forgotten500k campaign is a patient-led mission, backed by 16 prominent national charities and patient groups, including Evusheld for the UK, clinicians, scientists, and academics, with support from the All Party Parliamentary Group for Vulnerable Groups during the pandemic.
- It represents 500,000 people who are immunocompromised because of their condition, or because of the drugs they received. These people can be young or old, from all socioeconomic backgrounds, ethnicities, genders, sexualities, and abilities.
- It is a health advocacy campaign team established in Summer 2022 to seek more protection for immunocompromised patients who do not respond to vaccination.
- Nikola Brigden, Mark Oakley, and Martin Eve are patient and campaign leads, with a clinical champion role taken by Dr Lennard Lee, University of Oxford.
- Evusheld for the UK is a grassroots organisation with no affiliation to or funding from AstraZeneca.