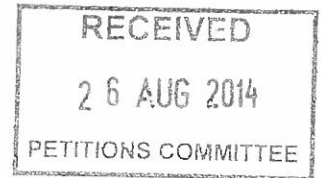




**THE HON PETER DUTTON MP
MINISTER FOR HEALTH
MINISTER FOR SPORT**



Ref No: MC14-008111

Dr Dennis Jensen MP
Chair
Standing Committee on Petitions
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Chair

Thank you for your correspondence of 23 June 2014 (926/1393) regarding a petition calling for Hematopoietic Stem Cell Transplants (HSCT) to be made available to Australian patients with multiple sclerosis (MS) under the Medicare system.

There are no regulatory barriers to the use of stem cell treatment for MS. Under the Therapeutic Goods (Excluded Goods) Order No. 1 of 2011, stem cells that are collected from a patient by their medical practitioner for treatment on that patient are not regulated by the Therapeutic Goods Administration. The decision to use such a treatment therefore is the professional decision of the medical practitioners and the hospitals in which they work.

All medical procedures come with some level of risk and the decision whether or not a patient is a suitable candidate remains within the professional judgement of the medical practitioners involved.

MS Australia issued a statement in March 2014 that HSCT is not a treatment for everybody, and that it is a high-risk treatment that is still deemed unproven by the international research community. The statement says that HSCT is currently only considered by some doctors and hospitals on a case-by-case basis for those who have an early, aggressive form of relapsing MS that is resistant to all other treatments. The statement is available at www.msaustralia.org.au/news.

The Australian Government, through the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) research and clinical trials, assists with building the body of evidence around safety and efficacy of medical treatments and improves the translation of new knowledge into evidence-based public health policy and clinical practice. In 2013, more than \$800 million was committed to fund health and medical research.

More specifically, since 2000, the NHMRC has committed over \$535 million towards research relating to Stem Cell Therapies with over \$18 million committed to Hematopoietic Stem Cell Therapies, and over \$59 million to research on MS.

The Australian Government is committed to delivering a safe, effective and efficient health care system that is fiscally sustainable in the longer term. If a medical service is not covered under the Medical Benefits Schedule, an application can be made to the Medical Services Advisory Committee (MSAC). The MSAC is an independent expert committee that provides advice on whether a medical service should be publicly funded based on an assessment of its safety, clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness.

Currently, there are no applications before the MSAC relating to HSCT. More information about the MSAC, including details about how to submit an application can be found at www.msac.gov.au.

I trust this information is of assistance to the Standing Committee on Petitions.

Yours sincerely

' 17/1/14
PETER DUTTON