



**National Allergy Strategy Group (NASG)
All Party Group for Allergy meeting
Airborne allergies: the effect on quality of life**

On June 8th 2011, the National Allergy Strategy Group (NASG) held a meeting of the All Party Group for Allergy in Westminster. Chaired by Jo Swinson MP the event looked at the effect of airborne allergies, such as allergic rhinitis and allergic asthma, on quality of life and heard from those living with these conditions. The meeting also featured a presentation from Consultant Allergist Dr Glenis Scadding.

About allergy

Allergy encompasses a wide range of conditions and is often complex and multi-system. In many patients it is chronic and in others it appears as acute attacks, some of which can be severe and even fatal.

Around 20 million people in the UK, or 1 in 3 of the population, live with allergy and an estimated 7 million of those have allergy severe enough to require specialist care. Living with allergy can affect significantly patients' quality of life regardless of whether they suffer from mild or more severe allergies.

However, allergic disease is preventable or controllable if patients have access to specific allergy diagnosis, management and support. Providing an allergy service on the NHS is cost effective in that it reduces ongoing illness and the demands this places on the NHS. For example, accurate diagnosis allows many patients to self manage their allergic disease.

The patient voice

Those affected by airborne allergies such as to pollen, dust mite or animal hair can benefit from immunotherapy which is a medical intervention which, in most cases, can greatly reduce symptoms. The meeting heard from James Ridley-Jones a 16 year old who had lived with allergic rhinitis and asthma for much of his young life meaning long periods of time off school and frequent trips to the GP surgery. In order to improve his quality of life his parents went privately to an allergist and James was successfully desensitised. He described the huge difference this has made to his life and urged the NHS to consider making this treatment widely available for others with this condition.

For more information, visit the NASG's website at: www.nasguk.org

We also heard from Marya Ireland and her son Tanglin who had received immunotherapy very successfully whilst living in Singapore where Tanglin was born. The immunotherapy injections meant his allergy to dust mite didn't affect his quality of life. However on returning to the UK Marya found that the treatment was not available on the NHS and, after a great deal of research, has had to resort to paying a private allergist to carry out the treatment which makes such a difference to Tanglin's life.

Beth Stokes and Theresa Evans were both concerned by the lack of knowledge within hospitals having had to explain the severity of their allergies to medical staff whilst under their care. Beth has a severe allergy to yeast meaning even being near someone eating a sandwich can cause her to have a reaction and Theresa has a severe latex allergy including to airborne particles. Both are calling for greater education across the NHS in order to prevent unnecessary reactions.

All patients attending the meeting feel very strongly that allergy is a forgotten condition in the UK and that the effect on their quality of life is greatly underestimated. We heard from those who struggle with every day activities such as: gardening; playing football; being outdoors at certain times of the year and taking exams or even just attending school.

The NASG is concerned that, at present, there is an unacceptable gap between patient need and service provision. Much allergic disease is preventable or controllable if patients have access to specific allergy diagnosis, management and support. Providing an allergy service on the NHS is cost effective in that it reduces ongoing illness and the demands this places on the NHS. For example, accurate diagnosis allows many patients to self manage their allergic disease. Currently NHS allergy services are poor and the patients at this meeting are calling for improvements to local services to allow them to access better quality care and treatment.

More information

The National Allergy Strategy Group is an alliance of the professional organisation BSACI (British Society for Allergy and Clinical Immunology), the patient charities, Allergy UK, The Anaphylaxis Campaign and the Allergy Alliance and industry partners. Since its formation the NASG has worked, with others, to highlight the need for improved allergy services for patients at all levels in the NHS.

For more information on the work of the NASG or to get involved in the campaign please contact Mandy East mandy@nasguk.org or visit www.nasguk.org

You can also join the NASG Facebook page and follow us on Twitter @AllergyCampaign

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