The Cancer Drugs Fund is papering over the cracks of a much bigger issue' says Breakthrough Breast Cancer

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Parliamentarians heard Breakthrough Breast Cancer raise concerns over the ever-growing issue of access to life-extending drugs that exists across the UK at the charity's annual reception in the House of Commons yesterday.

Over the past six weeks Breakthrough has been gathering support for its Demand a Fair Price campaign, calling for fairer access to life-extending drugs across the UK, and have received thousands of registrants.

Drugs exist that can offer thousands of women living with incurable breast cancer extra time with their loved ones, free from many of the side effects associated with traditional cancer therapies. But the inflated prices being set for these treatments are creating a barrier which no regulatory system can overcome.

Three clear calls to action were laid out yesterday as part of the Demand a Fair Price campaign which in the short term is pushing for:

§ Commitment from all political parties to extend the Cancer Drugs Fund in England until the end of the next parliament

§ All political parties to commit within their manifestos to finding a long-term, UK wide solution to the problem of lack of routine access to life-extending drugs by the end of the next parliament, working with the pharmaceutical industry and patient groups

§ The Welsh and Northern Ireland assemblies to introduce a similar system to the Cancer Drugs Fund to ensure that patients get access to the drugs they need

The overall goal of the campaign is to ensure that all women have access to the breast cancer drugs they need – irrespective of where in the UK they live. Breakthrough are committed to working closely with government, industry and stakeholders to develop and embed a new system of drug pricing and evaluation.

As part of the campaign, Breakthrough is asking the public to encourage their local MP to raise the issue in parliament and make sure their party leader makes a commitment in their election manifesto to tackle the issue.

Chris Askew, Chief Executive of Breakthrough Breast Cancer, said: "We are determined to stop breast cancer for good, and making sure every woman receives the treatment she needs is the first step. In the last year alone, three promising drugs for secondary breast cancer have been rejected for routine use on the NHS due to their high cost.

"The Cancer Drugs Fund was only supposed to be a temporary solution and, while it should remain until a workable alternative is found, it is merely papering over the cracks of a system which is no longer fit for purpose.

"The Government has already made attempts to reform the system in England – a positive step forward – but this is a problem that will need long-term solution, not a series of sticking plasters. With no CDF in place, patients in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are being denied the drugs they need. If we are serious about beating cancer, this unacceptable situation must be addressed.

"Innovative, effective drugs sitting on the shelf are of no use to anybody, least of all patients. Whilst there will be no quick fix solution to this problem, the pharmaceutical industry will need to get serious about its pricing and whoever forms the next government will need to get a grip on the problem and take action to resolve it.

"Until we have a sustainable, UK-wide system in place, the future availability of the treatments that regulators are being continually forced to reject will remain uncertain."

Dr Nicholas Turner is an Academic Consultant Medical Oncologist who specialises in the

treatment of breast cancer and Team Leader at the Breakthrough Toby Robins Breast Cancer Research Centre at the Institute of Cancer Research, London. He said: "Thanks to research breakthroughs, we've made huge advances in how we treat breast cancer and targeted drugs for secondary breast cancer are more effective than ever before. But the fact is that these new and highly effective drugs are not getting to those that need them and it's frustrating to see for all involved.

"These drugs aren't providing a cure, but they can give women living with incurable breast cancer months, and sometimes years, of good quality extra time with their loved ones, free from the side effects associated with less advanced treatments. Until the day comes when we know how to stop breast cancer from spreading and becoming incurable, we must find a way to make the drugs that offer the best hope for women and their families available to them on a consistent basis."

Heather Lawrence, who has been living with secondary breast cancer since 2008, said: "The myth that women like me are all spending our days suffering and immobile getting more and more ill still endures despite the fact that it is no longer the case for many people.

"The formidable cost of new tailored treatments is a hurdle, but don't forget that we are mothers, sisters, daughters; we run our households, we work and pay our bills, we are responsible for raising the next generation, we matter to a whole network of lives around us. When we die, the shockwaves radiate outwards, and every life in that network is touched for the worse leaving a tear in the fabric of our families and our communities."

Sharon Hodgson MP, Co-Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Breast Cancer, who spoke at the parliamentary reception said: "Ahead of the general election, I will be supporting Breakthrough in calling on all political parties including my own to commit to solving the issues that currently exist around access to drugs. This will come from negotiations and ongoing discussion with pharmaceutical companies, regulators and charities to create a new system which will ensure all cancer patients across the UK can access the drugs they need at a fair price to the NHS.

"We've come a long way in developing new and better drugs for breast cancer but to keep moving towards a future where women can live longer feeling well, spend less time in hospital with debilitating side effects and more time with their families, and keep working if they are able to, we need to find a way to guarantee access to the drugs that can make this possible."

Breakthrough Breast Cancer want to change the story for every woman, for every family, for good. To help demand a fair price for life-extending drugs, take action now at www.breakthrough.org.uk/demandafairprice.

-ENDS-

About Breakthrough Breast Cancer

Breakthrough Breast Cancer is the UK's leading breast cancer charity dedicated to saving lives through improving early diagnosis, developing new treatments and preventing all types of the disease.

The need for Breakthrough Breast Cancer's work has never been greater. Breast cancer is the most common of all cancers in the UK, with 50,000 women diagnosed every year and 1,000 women dying every month.

Breast cancer is not yesterday's problem; it's a disease that affects more women every year. Breakthrough Breast Cancer is working harder than ever before to stop women getting, and dying from, the disease.

The charity funds 25% of the breast cancer research in the UK, campaigns to ensure survival rates are among the best in the world and educates women to recognise the signs and symptoms of the disease.

Over the next six years Breakthrough will take its ground-breaking work to the next level by investing at least £100 million in research that has the power to stop breast cancer for good.

For more information go to breakthrough.org.uk

Twitter: @BreakthroughBC / Facebook: Breakthrough Breast Cancer / YouTube: Breakthrough Breast Cancer

For further information and interview requests please contact Felicity Norcott in the press office at Breakthrough Breast Cancer on 0207 280 4284 or felicityn@breakthrough.org.uk

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