

PE1517/OOOO

Petitioners' Submission of 26 November 2020

Scottish Mesh Survivors wish to thank the Public Petitions Committee for inviting Dr Veronikis to address them directly. His testimony was powerful and informative, highlighting the urgent need for the Scottish government to find a way of enabling mesh injured women to travel to see him in the US for safe, full, mesh implant removal.

Disturbingly, in the time he spent trying to find a way of fulfilling his promise to the women whose lives have been utterly destroyed by mesh, instead being thwarted by those who seem to have a vested interest in keeping him at arm's length so their own inadequacies are kept from the spotlight, this world class surgeon could have operated on 50 women and given them the only opportunity they will possibly ever have to regain some of the life they have each lost. It seems that Scottish government officials have pandered to surgeons who we believe repeatedly misled patients and abused their position of trust, seemingly in a bid to deflect blame and preserve egos. The very last thing being considered was the desperate needs of the patients whose lives were destroyed.

Following years of denial, patients were told their pain was 'all in their head', women were sent to psychiatric units, many were left suicidal, bedridden and in wheelchairs, when all along the surgeons who implanted these devices knew mesh implants were the problem. These same surgeons actively sought to undermine Dr Veronikis, a professional with a track record of the safe and full removal of thousands of mesh implants of all kinds, as well as do everything in their power to prevent him coming to Scotland.

Many women we have spoken to would rather continue suffering in pain than allow any of these implanting surgeons near them again. Others talk about using life savings to fund seeing Dr Veronikis in America.

Despite many face to face meetings with injured women, letters, emails and newspaper stories clearly setting out why mesh injured women lost all trust in Scottish surgeons, the government invested £millions and persist with developing a mesh removal centre staffed by some of those same implanting clinicians. Some of those same surgeons sat on working groups with us, and repeatedly told us they could not safely and fully remove so many of the implants favoured by Scottish hospitals, implants which have repeatedly been found to be defective in courts around the world.

But, suddenly, with no apparent obvious new training route, they are operating on women and telling them they 'can remove mesh'. There has been no evidence of their success, no evidence of how they suddenly acquired the skills to perform such highly specialised surgery. What there has been, however, is disturbing evidence of patients told they have had a full mesh removal when they have had anything but and patients suffering further injury while undergoing mesh removal.

Complaints have been lodged with the General Medical Council.

A number of women have been offered the opportunity to see surgeons in England, but for some, concern persists over their skills too.

In the absence of a safe and proven treatment route here, we believe the Scottish government should follow other countries and fund women able to travel to the US to be treated by the surgeon they trust and choose, if that is their wish. The cost of surgery in the US and including flights and accommodation is less than the cost of such surgery in Scotland.

Mesh implants caused the biggest medical scandal of modern times. The NHS chose to use these devices to save around £200 per patient without properly assessing if they were safe or adequately tested – they put us in harm's way. The harm caused was completely avoidable. We are victims of a failed system which was supposed to protect us. The very least we should now expect is to be treated by a surgeon of our choice, one with a proven track record.

We respectfully ask you to support our call to the Scottish government and to refund the small number of women who have already paid life savings to attend Dr Veronikis in the US. We cannot understand why they do not consider making a claim to recover the costs of our treatment from the medical manufacturers or their insurers.

Mesh injured women have already suffered and waited too long, each one of us at risk of deadly infection and antibiotic resistance at any time. We fought hard over the last nine years to ensure no other women are subjected to the harm that destroyed our lives. As a result, we believe thousands have been 'saved' from devastating injury. This is the first time we have asked anything for ourselves. We cannot undo the damage done to us but we hope the committee will support us in our plea to get the medical help we need, as soon as possible, so we can have the best possible chance of getting back what we can of our shattered lives.