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Dear Beatrice

Thank you for highlighting that March is Brain Tumour Awareness month at First Minister's Questions on Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> March. I was delighted to attend the photocall immediately afterwards and drop in to the reception that you sponsored. To further raise awareness, the Scottish Government is planning to light up our Edinburgh buildings on 28<sup>th</sup> March, in Brain Tumour Research's signature colours of pink and yellow.

I would like to reassure you that cancer remains a key priority for this government. That is why we published our ambitious ten-year cancer strategy and initial action plan in June last year. The strategy takes a comprehensive approach to improving patient pathways, from prevention and diagnosis through to treatment and post-treatment care. The strategy aims to improve cancer survival and provide excellent, equitably accessible, care across Scotland.

We know survival rates in some cancers, including brain, have improved at much slower rates than others, which is why we continue to focus on these less survivable cancers within the strategy and action plan. We also know that the earlier cancer is diagnosed the easier it is to treat. Unfortunately, diagnosing brain cancer can be challenging as symptoms are wide-ranging and often vague.

We do not underestimate how concerning it is that brain tumours are the most common cancer type to be diagnosed as an emergency presentation in the UK, and that brain tumours are the greatest cause of death in children and adults under the age of 40 in comparison with any other cancer.

Research is essential if we are to continue to develop new and effective approaches to the diagnosis and treatment of brain tumours. The importance of research is recognised in ambition 10 of the cancer strategy – 'Flourishing Research and Innovation'. As one of the eleven main ambitions set out in our 10-year vision, this ambition acknowledges the importance of equitable access to clinical trials in terms of the management of treatment options, laboratories having capacity to support clinical trials, and health professionals working collaboratively across academia, industry and the third sector. Embedding research, innovation, and data capture in all services is one of the major outcomes highlighted in the strategy, underscoring the importance of research to our strategic aim.

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Through its Chief Scientist Office (CSO), the Scottish Government provides a range of funding and support to Scottish NHS Health Boards in order to facilitate them to conduct high quality clinical research, including cancer research. This funding includes disease-specific NHS Research Scotland (NRS) Networks who support the running of both industry and academic clinical trials within their specialty areas. The largest of these networks is the Cancer Research Network, which operates across Scotland to increase, support, and sustain clinical trial activity in cancer care. In a typical year, around 3000 cancer patients participate in Clinical Trials supported by the NRS Cancer Network.

CSO also provides fellowship funding. One such fellowship stream – the NRS Career Researcher Fellowships – is open for NHS clinical staff who are interested in developing a research career within the NHS. This award provides funding to allow protected time in which NHS clinical staff can contribute towards and conduct research; fostering a strong research culture within our NHS. CSO currently supports several clinical oncologists through this scheme to conduct critical cancer research within the NHS. One such fellowship is centred on researching novel therapies for brain tumours.

In addition, CSO has recently established a collaboration with the Tessa Jowell Brain Cancer Mission to fund neurology fellowships in Scotland. These Fellowships are a 1 year programme for medical specialty trainees nearing completion of their training and consist of both clinical and research training. The aim is to train clinicians to appreciate the breadth of comprehensive brain tumour management and equip them with research skills to lead high impact practice-changing clinical trials of the future.

The Scottish Government, in partnership with Cancer Research UK (CRUK), has increased its funding for the Experimental Cancer Medicine Centres (ECMCs) in Glasgow and Edinburgh. ECMCs specialise in the delivery of early-phase cancer clinical trials, including in brain tumours. The combined funding for the adult and paediatric ECMCs is £4.68 million over 5 years from the start of this current financial year (2023-24).

In 2023, we published an Independent Report on Improving Equity of Access to Cancer Clinical Trials. We have established an Implementation Board through which we are working closely with the cancer research community on pathways to implementation of recommendations highlighted in the report.

Finally, I welcome Brain Tumour Research's plan to open a Scottish Brain Tumour Research Centre of Excellence. I am aware that officials are meeting with representatives from Brain Tumour Research to discuss their research strategy later this month.



**NEIL GRAY**

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