



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From Baroness Merron
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State*

*39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU*

09 August 2024

Dear Henrietta,

Thank you for meeting with me in July to introduce me to your work and for accompanying me to Guys and St Thomas' Trust to see their impressive work in utilising innovative technologies to improve patient experience.

I'm writing to provide an update to you and the many patients who have been harmed by sodium valproate and pelvic mesh.

I would like to express my gratitude for the work you have done for those harmed by these medical interventions. The report you published in February, building on the work by Baroness Cumberlege in the Independent Medicines and Medical Devices Safety Review, was an important milestone in ensuring such tragedies do not happen again. As the Minister for Patient Safety and Women's Health, I am committed to ensuring we learn from these tragic incidents.

Following the review, new measures have been introduced to ensure valproate is not started in new patients (male or female) younger than 55 years, unless two specialists independently consider and document that there is no other effective or tolerated treatment, or there are compelling reasons that the reproductive risks do not apply.

Additionally, nine specialist mesh centres are in operation across England, ensuring that women in every region with complications of mesh inserted for urinary incontinence and vaginal prolapse gets the right support. Each mesh centre is led by a multi-disciplinary team to ensure patients get access to the specialist care and treatment that they need. NHS England is working with the 9 specialist mesh centres to review mesh centre outcomes and patient experience. This will ensure they are supporting patients as planned, in addition to working with Sling the Mesh and Rectopexy Mesh Victims and Support Group.

The national pause, which was introduced in 2018, remains in place. But I recognise the work does not stop there, and there will be a great number of people waiting for a decision from government on the recommendations of your report.

I wanted to write to assure you that I am looking at this important issue and I will write with an update on progress at the earliest opportunity. I know this will be of great interest to both those affected and Parliamentarians who will be interested on behalf of their constituents.

All good wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Gillian". The lettering is cursive and fluid, with a prominent loop at the start of the "G" and a long, sweeping tail on the "n".

BARONESS MERRON