PRESS RELEASE
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Secretary of State visits Royal Brompton's asthma services

Health Secretary Alan Johnson visited Royal Brompton Hospital this week to meet asthma patients and gain an insight into the issues facing people living with the condition. The visit was co-hosted by Asthma UK.

The Trust provides nationally recognised services for the largest number of patients with breathing difficulties in the UK – including asthma, interstitial lung disease, chronic lung infection, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), acute respiratory failure and sleep disordered breathing.

Speaking to patients, the Secretary of State said, “It’s been really helpful to meet staff and patients at Royal Brompton Hospital today and to hear about and understand the real issues facing asthma patients.”

After visiting one of the specialist respiratory wards and the World Asthma Day awareness stand, Mr Johnson met two groups of patients to learn more about asthma.

Jasmina, a patient from London, said; “Mr Johnson was genuinely interested in what we had to say. He asked how asthma affected our everyday lives. I talked about the difficulties I had experienced getting back into work. I had to give up my job because I was just taking too much sick leave but I certainly don’t want to stay on benefits for long. We discussed the need for support for people like me to gradually get back to work. It was really good to talk to him.”

The Trust provides one of the largest tertiary asthma services in the country admitting over 1,000 inpatients each year. Already in 2008/9, it has accepted 1,200 new referrals to the service. The Trust also hosts the largest severe asthma service in the country with over 100 patients a year attending the severe asthma assessment service. Patients see a multi-disciplinary team that includes specialist consultants, asthma nurses, physiotherapists, psychologists and dieticians.
Clinical lead for asthma and allergy at Royal Brompton, Dr Andrew Menzies-Gow, said; “Mr Johnson was genuinely interested in the concerns of our patients and listened to them describing the struggles they have living with asthma. He said he had learnt a lot. I really enjoyed meeting him and I hope he found the visit useful.”

Director of the lung division at Royal Brompton & Harefield, Dr Rob Wilson, added; “He put patients at ease very quickly and got everyone involved in the discussion.”

Neil Churchill, Asthma UK Chief Executive said; “Meeting asthma patients and clinicians today has provided Mr Johnson with valuable insights into the impact asthma has on people’s lives; in particular, its role in hindering life chances such as education and employment. His challenge is to ensure that high quality, accessible services are available for people with asthma across the country.”

Mr Johnson used the learning from this week’s visit to inform a speech he gave today on health inequalities.

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