

## **Pleural Plaques**

**9. Mr. Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow) (Lab):** When the Government plan to publish their decision following their consultation on pleural plaques. [288146]

**The Secretary of State for Justice and Lord Chancellor (Mr. Jack Straw):** On 30 June, the Government published to the House two reports on the medical aspects of pleural plaques, one from the chief medical officer's expert adviser and a second from the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council. The Government will give further consideration to the issue of compensation for people diagnosed with pleural plaques before publishing a final response after the recess.

In addition, we are actively considering measures to make the United Kingdom a global leader in research on the alleviation, prevention and cure of asbestos-related diseases, and to help speed up compensation claims for those who develop serious asbestos-related diseases such as mesothelioma. The latter includes examination of the process for tracking and tracing employment and insurance records, as well as looking into the support given to individuals who are unable to trace such records.

**Mr. Hepburn:** Will the Secretary of State assure us today that pleural plaques sufferers will not be treated differently in terms of compensation regardless of whether they lodged their claim prior to the 2007 Law Lords judgment or after it and of whether live in Scotland, England, Wales or Northern Ireland?

**Mr. Straw:** As I said, we are giving active consideration to that. I understand my hon. Friend's concern, but we have to make our own decisions in this jurisdiction. I am sure that, in turn, my hon. Friend will wish to pay very careful attention to the conclusions of the expert appointed by the chief medical officer and to IIAC; they came to unanimous conclusions, including those backed by the three trade union representatives.

### **21 July 2009 : Column 742**

**Mr. Nigel Dodds (Belfast, North) (DUP):** Following on from the Scottish Government's decision to legislate in this area, did the Secretary of State note the recommendation of the relevant Department in the Northern Ireland Assembly that there should be a change in legislation to allow those with pleural plaques to sue in the courts and get compensation? Also, following on from what the hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Hepburn) said, whereas the regions of devolved government will have taken action to redress this terrible injustice to those who suffer from pleural plaques, will it not be perverse if the only area where people cannot claim is England and Wales?

**Mr. Straw:** As I said, or implied, in answer to my hon. Friend, it is the essence of devolution that different decisions can be made. It would be very curious indeed if the

result of devolution was that each jurisdiction had to follow the decisions of the other. We are seeking to consider the evidence very carefully, and I commend the evidence of the chief medical officer's expert's report and IAC to all hon. Members, whichever constituency they represent.

**Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone) (Lab):** I hear what my right hon. Friend says about the medical evidence of IAC, but will he look further at medical evidence during the recess, because I can tell him that the consultant who leads the charge for a national centre for asbestos-related diseases says that he believes that pleural plaques are a disease, and he sees people on a daily basis, a proportion of whom are affected by pleural plaques to the degree of having breathlessness? Will my right hon. Friend look again at fresh medical evidence over the recess?

**Mr. Straw:** I would be delighted to do so. In particular, I would like to facilitate a serious discussion at medical level between the medical practitioner expert to whom my hon. Friend referred and the expert appointed by the chief medical officer, because his conclusion and that of IAC are obviously at variance at present.