

Scots dad wins Sir Keir Starmer backing for vaccine priority for terminally ill

The Labour Party leader Sir Keir Starmer has given his unequivocal backing to a campaign to secure Covid-19 vaccine priority for terminally ill patients.

Sir Keir told campaigning father-of-two Fred Banning that he would raise the matter with Health Secretary Matt Hancock and do whatever he could personally to ensure people undergoing palliative care are given urgent consideration for access to vaccines.

Marketing executive Fred, 38, of East Renfrewshire, was diagnosed with Stage 4 bowel cancer in February and told that without treatment he had only nine months to live. Throughout the pandemic he and thousands of high-risk patients like him have shielded and been unable to live a fuller life outside of a restrictive bubble.

Approximately 250,000 patients undergo palliative care treatment in UK hospices each year, while many more do so as outpatients. If they were given early access to a vaccine it would mean they could make the most of the time they have left with loved ones.

Speaking on LBC Radio's "Call Keir" show today, Fred asked the Labour leader if he agreed there was a case for early vaccination for those with terminal illnesses on humanitarian grounds.

Sir Keir replied: "Fred, I really feel for you here, and I can imagine you just want to get a vaccine and spend as much time with your family as you possible can.

"And the answer to your question is yes, I will support you in this, yes I will meet you to talk about it, and yes I will certainly personally try to get hold of Matt Hancock and see whether something can be done about this.

"This is not party political by the way, Matt Hancock is a human being, the Prime Minister is a human being, they do understand this. Something needs to be done Fred, and I will do whatever I can to make sure that is done as quickly as possible."

Speaking after the show, Fred said: "I am heartened that Sir Keir understood immediately that for people in my position time is against us, and as it stands, the vaccine could come too late for some.

"His unequivocal support was very encouraging and I hope this matter can be accelerated and decisions taken on the best approach before the Christmas holiday recess. That would be a wonderful Christmas present, not just for my family, but for thousands of others who have been unable to do the simple things in life that we take for granted.

"Sir Keir is correct that this is not party political issue but a humanitarian one, and I hope the Health Secretary Matt Hancock will take a similar view and pull out the stops to make this happen."

Last week Scotland's First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, gave a similar pledge during First Minister's Questions, when she said: "I absolutely understand the sentiments and the reasons behind the request that is being made. We will continue to do what we can to make sure people at the end of their lives, families wanting to maximise the time they have with loved ones, have the priority that they merit, and we will respond

to (the letter) as soon as possible.”

Fred Banning added: “I hope that this issue can be prioritised on both sides of the border and that the combined efforts of Sir Keir, Matt Hancock and Nicola Sturgeon produce a result which is could literally be life-changing for those of us with limited time ahead.”

The campaign has been backed by 13 leading charities including Marie Curie, Beatson Cancer Care, the Scottish Cancer Foundation and the Ruth Strauss Foundation.