DH response to NICE consultations on sofosbuvir and simeprevir

Ministers strongly believe that clinically and cost effective drugs should be available to patients who will benefit. However, we also recognise that the new hepatitis C treatments are expected to lead to a significant increase in the numbers of patients presenting for treatment, which could have significant service implications.

We agree with NICE's assessment that NHS England has put forward a valid case for deferring the funding period to allow time to prepare for and put in place the necessary systems and mechanisms to implement NICE's recommendations effectively. It is important to note that Ministers' support for the proposed extension is on the understanding that NHS England will use this interim period to prepare and implement, from the end of July, an active programme to ensure that eligible patients are able to access these drugs promptly according to their clinical need.

Clearly, it is also vital that patients at urgent need of treatment should not be denied treatment during this interim period. It will be important that NHS England's interim plans for the period prior to August 2015 ensure that patients with the greatest need can continue to access appropriate treatment without undue delay.