

Parliament returned this week and back on the agenda was the Mesothelioma Bill. This piece of legislation is incredibly important for my constituents and others across a once heavy industry county.

Mesothelioma is a fatal lung cancer caused only by exposure to asbestos. With Chatham Dockyard once being a proud shipbuilding area it is hardly a surprise that those who lagged the national fleet and others working in and around the yard, we have a higher rate of Meso than other parts of the country.

However, Mesothelioma is not a condition confined to the industrial working class. There are many other people with different occupational pasts that are now being diagnosed with this disease, teachers being a particular concern.

Fortunately for most sufferers of Mesothelioma they are able to trace their former employer and their insurer, but for some, due to poor record keeping, there is no-one to sue for compensation. The Bill enables those people to apply for compensation from a scheme funded by current insurance companies.

It is a good piece of legislation and one that should be welcomed. However it could have been better and I tabled several amendments to improve the level of compensation received by those accessing the scheme and forcing insurance companies to pay a relatively small sum each to contribute towards medical research.

Sadly both were defeated by relatively small margins but this will not stop my determination to stand up for those affected by this dreadful disease. We need to ensure that we have the right palliative care for sufferers of this cancer, the right support for their families, access to proper legal advice, and faster, fairer compensation from insurance companies.

The Bill will now receive Royal Assent and I am proud that we have provided some form of compensation to victims but the battle will continue to do just that little bit more.