

## Cancer outcomes will be significantly improved by ensuring earlier diagnosis for all cancers

*The Government must be ambitious in its plan to drive improvements in cancer services and patient experience to make the UK's cancer outcomes and care equal to the best in Europe in the next decade.*

*To this end the Cancer Campaigning Group (CCG) is calling for change in six priority areas. This briefing sets out the CCG vision for early diagnosis.*

Early detection of cancer is crucial. For many types of cancer, the later it is diagnosed, the harder it is to treat and the poorer the patient's chance of survival. The CCG wants to ensure earlier diagnosis for all cancers, so that more patients have their disease identified at a stage when it can be treated effectively. Comparing data with other countries suggests that relatively poorer cancer survival rates in England are, at least in part, due to later diagnosis.

Reasons for 'late' diagnosis and treatment are many and varied, ranging from poor public awareness of cancer symptoms and presentation delays, to system failures, delays in primary care, inappropriate referral, delayed access to diagnostic facilities and a lack of suitable diagnostic tools – the impact of these factors vary across tumour groups. Research into the way in which patients are diagnosed reinforces the link between emergency presentation and poor survival rates.

We believe that GPs should be ready to refer whenever a patient presents with symptoms that could be cancer. Too often a cancer diagnosis is not considered early enough, resulting in late diagnosis and poorer outcomes and experiences.

The National Awareness and Early Diagnosis Initiative (NAEDI) focused attention on early diagnosis and we welcome the continuing project work funded as part of this initiative. The CCG welcomed the campaign to encourage earlier detection of breast, lung and bowel cancer which began in January. Encouraging people to present at their GP will be hugely important if earlier diagnosis is to be achieved and so it is vital that awareness and earlier detection of other cancers is also supported and encouraged.

Cancer screening will remain an important means of detecting cancer early. We acknowledge the importance of the cervical cancer, breast cancer and bowel cancer screening programmes and welcome the recent age extensions to the breast and bowel programme and the commitment to continue the roll out of the age extension to the breast screening programmes. There must, however, be better engagement with cancer screening programmes to encourage take up of invitations, for example, with disadvantaged groups. We also welcome research into screening for other cancer types, such as lung cancer and prostate cancer.

The Government should consider ways to incentivise commissioners, using survival rates and staging data, to ensure improvements in the early diagnosis of all cancers. This may include ensuring that commissioners work closely with local authorities on cancer awareness programmes.



The CCG supports the Government's decision to include one-year and five-year cancer survival rates as improvement areas in the NHS Outcomes Framework. In particular, we believe a one-year cancer survival indicator can be used to compel hospitals, clinicians and GPs to improve early diagnosis. However, collection and publication of robust one- and five-year cancer survival data can take a significant amount of time. This data should therefore be combined with data on stage of diagnosis and other factors, including age, sex and ethnicity, which may highlight patterns in the data. Plans to record cancer stage at the point of diagnosis will enable the identification of where cancer is being diagnosed late and ensure that action can be taken to change this. The collection of this data should be combined with appropriate accountability and incentive mechanisms.

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