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A Cancer Improvement Plan for NHS Wales 2023-2026

SUMMARY





The NHS in Wales has written a Cancer Improvement Plan which describes how we can improve cancer services.

The plan outlines how the NHS in Wales will aim to improve the experience and outcomes for people affected by cancer.

This is a summary of the Cancer Improvement Plan for Wales 2023-2026.

More people than ever living in Wales are getting cancer; this Improvement Plan will help those people working in cancer care to improve services. The Cancer Improvement Plan describes who is responsible for making improvements, when those improvements will be seen, and what actions will be taken to make sure these improvements happen.

The Cancer Improvement Plan looks at all aspects of care, from actions that are needed to try and prevent cancer from occurring in the first place, to diagnosis, treatment and living with or dying well with cancer.

These areas are covered in the following sections:

- 1** Stopping people getting cancer (Cancer Prevention)
- 2** Identifying a cancer as early as possible (Early Diagnosis)
- 3** Identifying that a person has cancer more quickly (Faster Diagnosis)
- 4** Improving waiting times for treatment for cancer (Elective Care Recovery)
- 5** Improving cancer care and timeliness through policy (Compliance with the Single Cancer Pathway/ National Optimal Pathways)
- 6** Treating cancer effectively (Effective Treatments)
- 7** Improving care for those whose cancer cannot be cured (Palliative and End of Life Care)
- 8** Supporting cancer patients and making services better (Improving Patient Experience)
- 9** Working together to make services better (Key System Wide Enablers)

1 Stopping people getting cancer (Cancer Prevention)

Cancers are much more common as we get older.

Risk factors such as smoking, being overweight, unhealthy eating, and drinking alcohol can increase the chance of getting cancer. Cancer often exists alongside other health conditions such as heart problems, breathing problems, diabetes, and stroke. People who live in lower income areas are more likely to get these conditions.

There are some cancers that can be caused by certain types of viruses (such as Human Papilloma Virus (HPV)). A vaccine is routinely offered to people, mainly, but not exclusively, teenagers that are eligible, which protects against the types of Human Papilloma Virus that cause these cancers.

What is the NHS in Wales going to do to help?

- ✓ Continue to support national projects, programmes and initiatives that help people to reduce the risk of cancer and other avoidable health problems.
- ✓ Ensure that everyone in Wales who is entitled to have a HPV vaccine is able to have it.
- ✓ Public Health Wales NHS Trust, primary care services (General Practitioner (GP) and community healthcare teams) and hospitals will help support the public and cancer patients to make healthier lifestyle choices.



Between
30-50%
of cancers are preventable as they can be caused by our lifestyle

2 Identifying cancer as early as possible (Early Diagnosis)

When a cancer is identified early, it is more likely that the patient will have a better outcome.

There are opportunities for some people to take part in regular screening tests to identify certain cancers (such as breast, bowel, and cervical cancers). However, we know not everybody in Wales chooses to take part in screening tests.

What is the NHS in Wales going to do to help?

- ✓ Use better data to identify where and why people are not attending screening opportunities which will help us take specific action.
- ✓ Public Health Wales NHS Trust, primary care services (General Practitioner and community healthcare teams) and hospitals will work together to try and increase the amount of people that are taking part in screening.

Getting people ready for cancer treatment before it starts (Health Optimisation/Prehabilitation)

Health optimisation and prehabilitation involves preparing people to cope better with the tests used to diagnose cancer, the side effects of cancer treatment, and recovery from treatment.

This includes encouraging people to be as physically active as possible, eat healthily and look after their mental wellbeing. In Wales, we are beginning to offer prehabilitation to some people diagnosed with cancer but not all.

What is the NHS in Wales going to do to help?

- ✓ Set standards for healthcare organisations in Wales to ensure that there is equal access to prehabilitation and that services offered are of the same standard across Wales.
- ✓ Primary care services, hospitals and charities will work together to promote the importance of seeking help for any worrying signs or symptoms of cancer and encourage those diagnosed with cancer to keep well whilst waiting for treatment. This will include supporting seldom heard and under represented people and groups to access these services.

3 Identifying that a person has cancer more quickly (Faster Diagnosis)



People who are diagnosed with cancer as early as possible are more likely to live longer and have less complications from treatments.

The NHS in Wales is pulling together a group of experts to look at how we can diagnose cancer as early as possible.

What is the NHS in Wales going to do to help?

- ✔ Work has already started to help diagnose people faster through Rapid Diagnosis Clinics. These will be rolled out across Wales.
- ✔ Develop specific centres where people can go to get tests and investigations done more quickly and efficiently, sometimes all in one go. These may be in hospital or non-hospital settings and may cover regions. Cancer tests will take priority in these centres.

4 Improving waiting times for treatment for cancer (Elective Care Recovery)

The waiting times for tests and treatment for cancer have significantly increased due to the impact COVID had on health services. Many were paused or delayed due to the measures that the NHS in Wales took to control the pandemic but also because there was not the workforce to deliver the care that patients needed.

Welsh Government have set goals for healthcare organisations to reduce waiting times. Healthcare organisations will need to work together to ensure there are improvements in waiting times for both cancer diagnosis and cancer treatments.

A series of National Optimal Pathways (NOPs) have been agreed which clearly describe what should happen for most patients as they move through their cancer journey.



What is the NHS in Wales going to do to help?

- ✓ Healthcare organisations will work differently to cut down the amount of time patients have to wait for cancer tests and treatment, for example by providing access to one-stop quick diagnostic centres, complying with the National Optimal Pathways; and using technology to make it quicker for doctors to diagnose skin cancers.
- ✓ Healthcare organisations will work across boundaries to help bring waiting times down across regions rather than just in their own areas.



5 Improving cancer care and timeliness through policy (Compliance with the Single Cancer Pathway/ National Optimal Pathways)

Wales has led the way in the United Kingdom in developing National Optimal Pathways for the majority of cancers.

Patients should receive treatment within

62 days

of when cancer is suspected



The National Optimal Pathways describe what should happen to a person with a suspicion of a cancer making sure they are seen, treated, and supported in a timely way. The pathways use the best research and evidence to describe what investigations and treatment should happen and in what order. The National Optimal Pathways help services to achieve the Single Cancer Pathway (SCP) target. This is the standard way in which healthcare organisations count and report cancer waiting times. Patients should receive their treatment within 62 days of when cancer is suspected.

This should help improve the patient experience and the success of the treatment by improving early diagnosis and reducing waiting times.

What is the NHS in Wales going to do to help?

- ✔ Monitor, review, and track the delivery of the Single Cancer Pathway and use of the National Optimal Pathways in line with targets set by Welsh Government.

6 Treating cancer effectively (Effective Treatments)



There are three main ways of treating cancer: surgery, radiotherapy, and Systemic Anti-Cancer Therapy (SACT). All of these treatments seek to improve cancer survival and/or quality of life.



Surgery

Surgery is an operation or procedure which aims to take out some or all of the cancer and possibly some nearby tissue. This can help it to stop growing and affecting the body and may help other treatments to work better.

Radiotherapy

Radiotherapy is used to treat some cancers by using x-rays or similar forms of radiation to stop the cancer growing/ destroy it.

Systemic Anti-Cancer Therapy

Systemic Anti-Cancer Therapy is any drug treatment used to control or treat cancer, this includes chemotherapy, immunotherapy, targeted therapy, hormonal therapy or a combination of these.



What is the NHS in Wales going to do to help?

- ✔ Work together to ensure all patients have better access to the best and most effective cancer treatments.
- ✔ Develop a digital version of the patient alert card for patients undergoing Systemic Anti-Cancer Therapy. The alert cards are wallet sized information cards that provide advice and guidance for patients and healthcare professionals to help manage any symptoms that they may experience during or after their treatment.
- ✔ Make recommendations to ensure that patients have access to information and advice 24-hours a day, 7-days a week regarding their Systemic Anti-Cancer Therapy. This is because undergoing Systemic Anti-Cancer Therapy can cause side effects, and other medical problems which need assessing by healthcare professionals.
- ✔ Improve both accessibility and waiting times for patients who need radiotherapy.
- ✔ Ensure the most up to date processes, science, and technologies are used in radiotherapy to maximise the benefits to patients and improve services.





Acute Oncology Services (AOS)

Some patients are first told that they have cancer in a hospital emergency department when they present with a new urgent problem. This is a more common occurrence in some cancers. Patients diagnosed in this way tend to have a worse experience, and outcomes are often poorer as the cancer may be diagnosed at a later stage.

Some patients may have side effects from their cancer or from treatment and need urgent help from healthcare professionals.

The NHS in Wales have developed a service that provides expert advice and care for patients that present as an emergency with cancer or related problems. This service is called the Acute Oncology Service.

What is the NHS in Wales going to do to help?

- ✔ Ensure that Acute Oncology Services in Wales work to the same set of standards.
- ✔ Provide equal access to Acute Oncology Services teams.
- ✔ Develop specific pathways for these patients to get them to the right care as quickly as possible and improve their experience.





Specialist services (Specialist/Tertiary Service Configuration and Sustainability)

The Welsh Health Specialist Services Committee (WHSSC) are responsible for ensuring that the population of Wales has fair and equal access to specialist and complex services. These services are only provided in certain hospitals or centres. The plan aims to improve the quality of, and access to these services.

What is the NHS in Wales going to do to help?

- ✔ Ensure that patients have equal access to specialist cancer services such as specialist diagnostic tests, for example special cancer scans and specialist radiotherapy and surgical treatments, by continually improving how Welsh Health Specialist Services Committee develop and monitor access to and provision of specialist tests and treatment. To ensure these are delivered to the highest standard and can be maintained, sometimes it will be necessary for patients to travel further to receive these tests and treatments.



Using new technology to improve cancer detection, diagnosis and treatments (sometimes known as Precision Medicine)

Cancer is often caused by the genes in the cells of our body going wrong. Cancer genomics is the study of how these changes in our genes can cause cancer. Developments in this area are exciting and ground-breaking for detecting and treating cancer and lessening the side effects of its treatment. This means that new ways of diagnosing, treating, and following up cancers will become available soon which will benefit patients.

What is the NHS in Wales going to do to help?

- ✔ Publish a detailed plan of how cancer genomics services will be delivered in a fair, timely and effective way in Wales.
- ✔ Healthcare organisations will work together to ensure services can support the advances in genomic testing, especially pathology services.

7 Improving care for those whose cancer cannot be cured (Palliative and End of Life Care)



For patients that are living with cancer that cannot be cured or are nearing the end of life due to cancer, individual personalised care can make a huge difference to their quality of life.

This is important for symptom control, mental wellbeing, social and psychological care. It is important that care for family and friends is also provided. Supportive palliative and end of life care services are guided by a dedicated National NHS Board, called the End of Life Care Board.

What is the NHS in Wales going to do to help?

- ✓ There will be national guidance developed for patients who are living with cancer that cannot be cured, or who are dying from cancer. This guidance should improve standards and access to this type of care.

8

Supporting cancer patients and making services better (Improving Patient Experience)

It is important that patients diagnosed with cancer have all the information they need and are supported through the whole pathway. This will help them to make informed decisions so that they get the right care.

Patients should have the opportunity to discuss their health beliefs, concerns, and preferences to make sure that the care that they receive is based around their individual needs. This should be documented in a written care plan which is produced and shared with the patient. Every cancer patient in Wales should be given a named professional to contact (for example a nurse or another health professional (Key Worker)), to support and help guide them to other services such as advice and information on benefits and getting access to social care.



What is the NHS in Wales going to do to help?

- ✔ Healthcare organisations will be supported to work together to ensure that patients receive care that is based around their individual needs and what matters to them, through better national guidance, tools, documentation, and standards.
- ✔ Healthcare organisations will be expected to ensure that all patients have an opportunity to tell us what went well and what could have been better.

9 Working together to make services better (Key System Wide Enablers)



There are several other issues that need to be improved in order to make cancer services and patient care work better.

Workforce

The people working in the NHS in Wales who provide care and support to patients with cancer are referred to as the workforce. Workforce planning needs to be better, including a greater understanding of the future workforce needs and improved access to training for both new and experienced staff working in cancer.

One of the main issues in cancer services in Wales is that we do not always have enough experienced workforce to provide the care that patients require in a timely way. An NHS Wales organisation called Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) will work with the rest of the NHS in Wales to develop plans to make the workforce more resilient and better at what they do. This will sometimes mean working differently, more efficiently and using new technologies. HEIW is not only responsible for supporting the existing workforce but also training and growing the workforce of the future.



Information and Intelligence

Information and Intelligence is the way in which we collect information about people affected by cancer, and how this information is shared between healthcare organisations. This includes trends to help identify where things are getting better or areas that need improvement.

An NHS Wales organisation called Digital Health and Care Wales (DHCW) is responsible for working with the rest of the NHS in Wales to develop a new cancer information system that will allow information to be shared between organisations. This will mean that the information about patients with cancer is more widely available to the professionals looking after them. Data will also be collected to show how well cancer services are being delivered and where there is variation in quality of care across Wales.

Research and Innovation

Cancer research identifies causes of cancer, and helps to develop new plans for prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and cure. In Wales we have published a Cancer Research Plan which describes what it wants to achieve in the next few years. Improvements in the quality of cancer services and patient outcomes require investment in cancer research. It also requires equitable access to research for more patients in Wales for example, recruiting eligible patients to take part in clinical trials where they have access to drugs and treatments that are in their testing stages.

Healthcare organisations will work together with cancer research organisations and charities to ensure that the Cancer Research Plan is put into action. It is important that patients in Wales have better and more equal access to cancer research trials when these are appropriate and available.

Innovation is the practical implementation of new technologies and ways of working. These may be more effective, safer, or more efficient. Healthcare organisations will work together to deliver the Innovation Action Plan which has been developed by Welsh Government, so that the care offered to cancer patients and the staff who care for them have the best up to date methods, technologies, processes, and equipment to deliver the best outcomes.



10 Summary



This plan is ambitious and will put the responsibility on all people involved in cancer care to deliver the improvements needed.

✓ It will support and enable people to improve the impact of the care provided by the NHS in Wales.

✓ By the end of the plan, there should be measurable improvement in the key areas of prevention, diagnosis, treatment effectiveness and experience of cancer patients in Wales.

