



# The All Party Parliamentary Group for Radiotherapy

## Press Release

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### **Following BBC's Panorama the APPG for Radiotherapy have launched a 6-point plan to transform radiotherapy services and save thousands of lives from the cancer backlog**

Experts including cancer specialists, radiotherapy professionals, charities and industry have endorsed a plan from MPs to rapidly transform radiotherapy services and save thousands of lives from being unnecessarily lost to the cancer backlog. The 6 point plan from the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Radiotherapy (APPG RT) launches as Monday's shocking episode of Panorama exposes the devastating impact of the Covid pandemic on cancer services and patients.

Chair of Action Radiotherapy, founder of Radiotherapy4Life and advisor to the APPG RT, Professor Pat Price said: "Thousands of lives are at stake. The radiotherapy community is pleading with the Government to take action, recognise the severity of the situation and seize this opportunity to rapidly boost our cancer fighting capacity. Here is a plan which clearly sets out the problem, and crucially, the solution. There is no more time for bureaucracy because Covid has so frighteningly exposed the deficiencies in cancer services. Lifesaving radiotherapy treatments must be a key part of the cancer recovery plan. Not the afterthought they have been for so many years. This report paves the way for delivering world class radiotherapy and dealing with the predicted surge in demand on our cancer services."

Global comparisons and leading experts are increasingly recommending radiotherapy treatments are at the heart of any cancer recovery plan. With a 60% drop in referrals and 20% drop in the start of treatments, there is a wave of demand anticipated to hit the NHS after the summer. Before the pandemic radiotherapy was needed by 1 in 4 of us at some point in our lives, required by 50% of cancer patients and used in 40% of cancer cures. Unlike many treatments disrupted by the pandemic, radiotherapy does not need Intensive care capacity like surgery, and it doesn't have the impact on immunity often associated with chemotherapy. It is relatively inexpensive compared to other cancer treatments and in recent years the technology used in treatments has rapidly advanced. However, years of chronic underinvestment and sub-optimal central commissioning, have left radiotherapy at a massive disadvantage with little of this improved technology actually deployed in the NHS. The APPG RT have reported on the simple, smart and cost effective changes

which would allow services to rapidly catch up and even surpass international comparisons. The 6 point plan aims to go to the heart of concerns that a lack of leadership from NHS England may result in the failure to take the necessary steps to gear up cancer services in anticipation of this predicted surge in demand.

Providing recommendations to Government as a follow up to the inquiry carried out by the APPG RT which exposed the crisis occurring in cancer services during Covid, it recommends the following action:

1. **Create a national Task Force:** Appoint a radiotherapy minister and Tsar to form a national task force of medical and industry professionals to ensure all available solutions already used in other countries are rapidly introduced in the UK. Sweep away the bureaucracy that has led to a ten year delay in the roll out of precision radiotherapy with SABR (stereotactic ablative radiotherapy), and sweep in appropriate leadership power and accountability to roll out all the other ground breaking IT and radiotherapy technology advances over that ten years.
2. **Introduce IT and network solutions:** Work with industry and modernise radiotherapy and invest in cutting edge IT and AI technology to allow workforce capacity and knowledge to be rapidly spread and implemented across the country. This change will be key to helping improve quality, access, and alleviate workforce issues. It is the only way.
3. **Replace out of date machines:** Create a ring- fenced central funding pot to replace out of date machines with newer more reliable technology to provide patients with better more precise treatments which can be delivered faster and so address the backlog. Change the situation where one fifth of trusts are using machines past the 10 year recommended lifespan, stopping frequent machine breakdowns, and solving the £140Million backlog in machine replacement costs.
4. **Increase the workforce:** Fund the 10-20% increase in the professionals needed to run the service and ensure the NHS can keep pace with demand.
5. **Increase access to radiotherapy:** End the situation where 3.5m patients need to travel over the 45 minute recommended travel time and stop the cancer postcode lottery by investing £250Million in new networked treatment delivery centres
6. **Raise the profile of radiotherapy** to the level such a curative and important cancer treatment deserves to ensure more patients are cured.

Chair of the APPG RT Tim Farron MP said: "Radiotherapy services have been the silent lifesaver in this country for so long and have suffered a damaging lack of planning because of that low profile. This report outlines how we can turn this around, transform services and rapidly make up for years of underinvestment. Cancer survival rates in the UK have been amongst the worst in Europe for years. We absolutely need a plan if we are to avoid a national tragedy brought about by the cancer backlog. The situation was laid bare in this Monday's alarming episode of BBC's Panorama, which highlighted many of the concerns we have been raising for months. We can no longer make excuses for not delivering smart changes which will boost radiotherapy to become a key pillar in our cancer recovery plan. We have

an opportunity to transform our radiotherapy services, boost cancer survival rates and save lives from the disruption to services caused by Covid.”

Vice-Chair of the APPG RT Grahame Morris MP said: “Radiotherapy has been a Cinderella service for too long, marginalised compared to other treatments, despite being one of the best and most curative cancer treatments available. People should not be travelling hours for treatment and they should have access to new life saving equipment. These are smart and sensible solutions which will allow us to rapidly turn the service into one of the best in the world and most importantly save many lives from the cancer backlog.”