



Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP  
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care  
Department of Health and Social Care  
39 Victoria Street  
London  
SW1H 0EU

22 May 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

### **The need for National Cancer Recovery Plans**

As Chairs of the Cancer All-Party Parliamentary Groups, we are writing to ask that you urgently publish your recovery plans for the cancer system to ensure that the 2.4 million people currently living with cancer across England can receive the cancer treatment and care that they need.

Colleagues across the NHS have done a remarkable job in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring that our health system was not overwhelmed within the peak, with sufficient critical care capacity throughout. However, this has unfortunately come at a price for millions of people with cancer who are going through or awaiting surgery and/or treatment, and many more with suspected symptoms who need to access diagnostic services.

Whilst clear guidance was issued by NHS England to prioritise urgent cancer treatment within the pandemic, we know that many patients have had their cancer treatment disrupted. The need to respond to the rise in urgent care, coupled with the increased risk of COVID-19 infection for cancer patients, reduced presentation in primary care and the decline in two week wait cancer referrals, have all resulted in a backlog of cancer treatment and diagnostics. We understand that it may take many months to address this backlog.

A number of the fantastic cancer frontline workforce have been redeployed to assist in the pandemic response. We hugely value their support and endeavours within this difficult time. But we are concerned that the cancer workforce, already depleted pre-pandemic, will return to normal duties, to an even larger backlog of work, having just supported the fight against COVID-19 in very difficult circumstances.

We have also seen through the volume of casework we receive, and corroborated by a number of health charities, that the current situation is having a detrimental impact on the mental health and welfare of people with cancer. Changes and cancellations to cancer care is often the cause of this increased need for support. We are seeing that disruption to treatment is often followed by a lack communication and follow up support in this difficult time.

We warmly welcome the directive of NHS England in late April calling for the restoration of cancer services within 6 weeks. We acknowledge that local health systems are best placed to find the best solutions for local areas in seeking to restore cancer services. However, we are



concerned that without national support and oversight, that unnecessary variations of cancer treatment will continue to occur across the country.

We are concerned that this increased unmet demand for cancer treatment which if not addressed, will have a significant impact on people's health, wellbeing and prognosis. It is

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vital that we see action now on a national level ensuring comprehensive plans for how the NHS in England will catch up and support people living with cancer.

This is why all the Chairs of the cancer All-Party Parliamentary Groups have come together from across the House of Commons to ask that you urgently publish your cancer system recovery plans, with the necessary accompanying financial package of support to restore cancer treatment, screening and diagnostic services, to ensure that people living with and affected by cancer in England can access the cancer services they require.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the matter in more depth. We understand the many calls on your time but do view this as an issue of some urgency.

#### **Ovarian Cancer**

Yours sincerely,

**Henry Smith MP**  
**Chair, All-Party Parliamentary Group**  
**on**  
**Blood Cancer**

**Tim Farron MP**  
**Chair, All-Party Parliamentary Group**  
**on**  
**Radiotherapy**

**Tonia Antoniazzi MP**  
**Chair, All-Party Parliamentary Group**  
**on**  
**Cancer**

**Craig Tracey MP**  
**Chair, All-Party Parliamentary Group on**  
**Breast Cancer**

**Sharon Hodgson MP**  
**Chair, All-Party-Parliamentary Group**  
**on**

**Thangam Debbonaire MP**  
**Chair, All-Party Parliamentary Group on**  
**Children, Teenagers, and Young Adults**  
**with Cancer**



*Amy Callaghan*

**Amy Callaghan MP**  
**Chair, All-Party Parliamentary Group on**  
**Pancreatic Cancer**

*Mark Tami*

**Mark Tami MP**  
**Chair, All-Party Parliamentary Group on**  
**Stem Cell Transplantation**

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