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Peninsula Cancer  
Alliance

# Newsletter

**Welcome to the October edition of the Peninsula Cancer Alliance Newsletter. Something to look forward to every quarter.**

Here at the Peninsula Cancer Alliance we are very proud of the work that everyone takes a part in. Moving forward, please look out for our newsletter which will be sent out every quarter and will highlight the projects and updates that have been taking place throughout the peninsula. These news items will also be appearing on our [website](#).

## A message from the board: Kate Shields



I am pleased to present this, our first newsletter for the Peninsula Cancer Alliance. I am the Chief Executive of Royal Cornwall Hospital, a mental health and acute nurse by background and I was the Director of Specialised Commissioning in the South before becoming the Chief Executive of RCHT. I took over as Chair of the Alliance in April 2020. My role is to lead the Alliance along with my CEO and STP colleagues in the Peninsula.

It is really important for me that we deliver our commitments on the cancer performance thus ensuring that cancer patients in the Peninsula receive a fast and efficient service wherever they live in the Peninsula. Our performance for Cancer is good and we have an ambition to be even better. Being in a position to support this as Chair of the Peninsula Cancer Alliance is very important to me. Alongside the performance, our Alliance is working through leading

edge developments changing cancer pathways, ensuring that patients are able to benefit from the latest trials and the latest drugs available. Our partnership in the Peninsula is wide-ranging, working with our service users, our provider networks, the universities and our two STPs. Our Alliance teams work through our system colleagues to support delivery of the priorities in the Long Term Plan for cancer, commissioning pathway changes with our providers and providing pump priming funding support to enable the delivery. Together our task is to make our Cancer Services the best in the country.

## A message from our Expert Patient Representative: Malcolm Merrett

I feel that one of the main problems for cancer patients over the last 6 months has been the lack of face to face support for people who have been through or are going through the journey that they are on. I help with a support group, who have been unable to meet due to COVID-19 restrictions, other support groups are running virtually via Zoom etc. However, it's the face to face that people are missing, the hugs, the side conversations, the chats over a cup of tea.

I met with an ex patient the other day, who also helps with a support group at another Trust, some of the feedback she was getting was that patients were wanting face to face consultations rather than the phone/video calls they have been receiving.

Alternately, a consultant I was speaking with mentioned the struggle to get some of the really needy patients to actually attend at the hospital for appointments. With problems of this variety we must keep communicating and re addressing how we do this with patients.



## Summary of cancer response to Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic has obviously had a significant impact on all parts of our Health Service, but the Cancer Alliance has been working with services across the Peninsula to make sure patients can still be diagnosed and treated. We have established a Virtual Treatment Hub, where our senior clinicians “meet” to discuss how to adapt to the challenges Covid-19 presents and support each other across the Peninsula. This has included the use of community hospitals for chemotherapy, surgery by our teams in independent hospitals and expanded tests for GPs to help understand the best diagnostic test for those with abdominal symptoms. This fantastic effort meant that in July our service actually achieved the national standard for seeing patients within 2 weeks of being referred urgently by their GP and then providing treatment within 62 days. In fact, 98% of treatments in July were carried out within 31 days of the decision to treat.

We have also accelerated some improvements that we had planned before the pandemic. This includes better ways to take biopsies of the prostate that both reduce infection risk and avoid the need for a general anaesthetic and the move to providing some chemotherapy orally rather than as an infusion, with the drugs being delivered to the patient's home.

The pandemic has also meant that many of our consultations are now by telephone or video. We hear our patients really appreciated the ability to still have a consultation during this period and much of what we have learned will continue, to allow patients to talk to their cancer team without having to travel. But we wanted to know much more about what patients think about these types of appointment. So, we have carried out a review of the evidence and are planning to investigate this further locally. There will be more about this in our next newsletter.

## Encouraging patients with symptoms of lung cancer

We're urging people to take action and recognise the signs of lung cancer, following a worrying decline in people attending appointments.

Latest figures have highlighted the drop in patients seeking medical help when experiencing potential symptoms of lung cancer; and fewer people are accessing treatment for the condition in hospitals across the South West.

The data tells us those attending hospital for suspected lung cancer following referral by their GP, fell to below 20% of normal levels during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Although the numbers have since increased, the aim is for the NHS to retain normal levels of referrals as we approach the autumn.

Investigation and treatment for cancers are being prioritised and it is vitally important to attend. Lung cancer is more treatable now than it has ever been, with new and more-tailored therapies.

### **Dr Joe Mays, a GP from Claremont Medical Practice in Exmouth, said:**

"It's really important that patients who are concerned they may have a serious health problem contact their GP, especially if it is related to a symptom of cancer.

"Because of the continued need to reduce face-to-face contact, most GP surgeries will book you a phone call in the first instance, but please don't let this put you off.

"Following the phone call your GP will be able to arrange a face-to-face examination and all necessary tests as normal."

Our hospitals are safe to attend, with staff working hard to minimise the risk of Covid transmission as well as clinicians using the necessary PPE to protect you. Staff and patients are wearing masks during appointments and the waiting areas keeping patients at a safe distance from each other.

[Here](#) our Early Diagnosis and Prevention Lead - Dr Joe Mays, explains more about symptoms and getting them checked.

## Launch of the MySunrise App

The MySunrise app has now been launched to support cancer patients in the South West with all the information they need conveniently located on their smart phone. The app has been developed to support cancer patients and their families from the moment of their diagnosis all the way through their treatment pathway and is expected to support thousands of people in Devon and Cornwall.



During the Covid-19 pandemic, cancer patients across the country were left feeling isolated and vulnerable. 'We initially created the app to support patients with the right advice and support at the right time whilst undergoing their cancer treatment.' Explains John McGrane, Consultant Oncologist at Royal Cornwall Hospital. 'With the challenges of coronavirus, we are now able to get up-to-date information directly to patients at a very difficult time for them, waiting and worrying at home about their treatment.'

"Using the app has made a big difference to the way we work with cancer patients in Cornwall and we are thrilled that the Peninsula Cancer Alliance have been able to support the development of an unique version of The MySunrise app across 4 more NHS Trusts in the South West. The app is now available to download and judging from the feedback in Cornwall, we hope it will now continue to support thousands of cancer patients and their families across the South West." Added Dr John McGrane.

The app is free to download for cancer patients and their families, and acts as a patient companion which guides and supports them through their cancer treatment. It is complete with a whole range of videos, relevant links, cancer resources and contact information all specific to their own NHS Hospital cancer centre. It can help patients find everything they need to know on there, from which bus to catch to the hospital right through to support groups in their local areas and what to expect when coming in for treatment.



The MySunrise app includes features designed to improve the ability of cancer centres to communicate directly with patients, reducing the need for patients to contact their centre or visit unnecessarily. Available to download from the 30th September on the App stores, MySunrise will allow the 5 Cancer Centres using it to keep patients up to date about their treatment and how to contact their Cancer Nurse Specialist. It also helps patients access video consultations, contains a section on side effects that may be experienced whilst on treatment, and allows patient to directly access advice on Covid-19 and how it is affecting services in their area.

'This is a fantastic example of a digital innovation in the Peninsula, with cancer centres pulling together to help give patients more control and information about their treatments and where to turn when they need help.' Explained Dr George Brighton, a GP in Devon and Director, Technical Health Ltd. 'The app allows each Trust to communicate with their cancer patients, giving them the right advice and helps point them to video consultations, reducing the need for them to leave home to travel into hospital. The ability to easily provide cancer patients with up to date information is a real benefit at the moment in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic.' Dr Brighton added.

## Rapid Diagnostic Pathway

The Peninsula Cancer Alliance is establishing Non-Specific Symptom (NSS) Rapid Diagnosis Service for patients presenting with serious, but non-specific cancer symptoms. This is a new pathway and provides a mechanism to allow patients whom the GP has a high suspicion of cancer but do not fit the criteria for referral on an existing two week wait pathway to undergo further diagnostics in secondary care, urgently.

Based on the Oxford Scan model it is estimated that 2500 NSS referrals will be made per annum across the Peninsula with an 8-12% cancer conversion rate. The pathway model adopted has been to build upon the Acute Oncology Service with additional GP, Clinical Nurse Specialist and Navigator Support. This programme is funded for the next five years.



As this is a new pathway the alliance will be carefully monitoring patient experience through a regular pulse survey exploring the patients experience of the pathway from GP through to diagnosis. Care co-ordinators (known as navigators locally) will be supported to use this feedback (and best practice) to improve the pathway, using NHS improvement methodology, directed through the alliance wide navigator training and development programme.

Covid-19 had an initial impact on the implementation of the NSS programme causing it to pause for four months but it has now restarted and all five trusts are now progressing at pace with University Hospitals Plymouth now live for its population and Royal Cornwall Hospital Trust scheduled to go live by the end of the month. Torbay and South Devon and North Devon Hospital will then follow in October with Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital in November.

A programme to extend the Rapid Diagnosis Service across all tumour sites from 2019-2025 with £8.84m was submitted and approved in February, prioritised by those tumour sites with later stage diagnosis, and those with longer patient waits. As a result of COVID, Alliances were asked to accelerate implementation of Rapid Diagnosis Service to improve the resilience and responsiveness of cancer services to manage increased diagnostic waiting lists and capacity and respond to any sudden influx of patients. Pathway work that was previously scheduled for 2020/23 has been brought forward and is set out in the Peninsula Cancer Alliance priority work plan. The Rapid Diagnosis Service focus for 2020/21 is on Upper Gastrointestinal, and Breast. The programme for Lower Gastrointestinal, Head and Neck, Lung and Skin that was scheduled for 2021/22 has been brought forward and is being started this year. This work programme is governed by the Rapid Diagnostic Steering Group, chaired by Amy Roy, University Hospitals Plymouth.

## Quality of Life survey

Public Health England, NHS England and NHS Improvement are leading the way in cancer care by recognising that quality of life (QoL) outcomes are as important to patients as survival. We are launching a nationwide QoL survey in September 2020. Initially we will survey people who have been diagnosed with breast, prostate or colorectal cancer. People with all other cancer types will be included from 2021 onwards. People will be sent a survey 18 months after their diagnosis to assess their QoL. The information collected from the survey will be used to work out how best to support the growing number of people living with and beyond cancer. This is an ambitious programme with a scale and depth that isn't being matched anywhere else in the world.

Although patient reported outcome measures (PROMs) that focus on QoL are in use in parts of the NHS, and in clinical trials round the world, the potential for PROMs to improve care and outcomes for people affected by cancer has not yet been realised.

Only by monitoring QoL, using a consistent assessment point with nationwide coverage, can data be made available to help improve care across the NHS. For the first time, our survey will routinely measure QoL outcomes in a way that influences health policy, professional practice and patient empowerment.

We want to encourage as many people as possible to complete their survey so that the information collected fully represents our cancer population.

An experienced patient survey company (Quality Health) is managing the survey invite and response system. All the survey responses are being held securely by the Cancer Registry at Public Health England. The Cancer Registry are linking the survey responses with existing data related to each person's diagnosis and treatment.



Eligible patients will receive a direct invitation to complete the QoL survey online. The survey is easy to complete and generally takes between five and 10 minutes. The survey asks about how people are doing. People's answers can be related to their cancer diagnosis and treatment, other illnesses, or other things happening in their life. The survey company (Quality Health) is managing a website [www.CancerQoL.england.nhs.uk](http://www.CancerQoL.england.nhs.uk) and free helpline **0800 783 1775** to support patients to complete the survey and respond to any queries or difficulties.

The results will be analysed by Public Health England. We anticipate that national and regional level reports will start to be made available in 2021. We will also be testing the feasibility and utility of providing individual summary reports to patients and their clinicians during 2020, prior to a decision on implementing these in 2021.

## Current campaigns

### Help Us Help You

Famous faces, including TV chefs Gordon Ramsay, Nadiya Hussein, and actor Emma Thompson are backing a major new campaign urging anyone concerned about cancer to get checked and to keep routine appointments, as new research found that even now, nearly half (48%) of the public would delay or not seek medical help at all.

A fifth (22%) would not want to be a burden on the health service while a similar number said that fear of getting coronavirus or passing it onto others was a major reason for not getting help.

More than four in ten people would leave it longer to get health advice than they normally would have before the coronavirus outbreak, however delaying can have serious consequences for some cancers.

NHS staff have pulled out all the stops to keep cancer services going throughout the pandemic, with almost one million people referred for checks or starting treatment since the virus took hold.

The NHS's Help Us Help You access campaign will use TV adverts, billboards and social media to urge people to speak to their GP if they are worried about a symptom that could be cancer, and also remind pregnant women to attend check-ups and seek advice if they are worried about their baby.

England's top GP says that people should not hesitate to get help and that waiting could have serious consequences for patients.

**Dr Nikki Kanani, GP and medical director for primary care in England** said: Alongside treating 110,000 people with coronavirus, NHS staff have gone to great lengths to make sure that people who do not have Covid can safely access services.

“So whether you or a loved one has a routine appointment, or a potential cancer symptom, our message is clear – you are not a burden, we are here to safely care for you so please don't delay – Help Us Help You and come forward as you usually would.

“Cancer is easier to treat when it's caught at an earlier stage and so coming forward for a check could save your life.”

NHS services have put a range of measures in place so that people can be treated safely throughout the pandemic including Covid protected cancer surgery hubs, a Covid friendly drugs fund which means fewer trips to hospital and chemotherapy being delivered in more convenient locations.

## Save the dates; Up and coming cancer related dates

### Macmillan are running a stay sober for October campaign

If you want to take part and find out the benefits of going sober for October please visit; [www.gosober.org.uk](http://www.gosober.org.uk)

### October is Breast Cancer awareness month.

To look up some fundraising ideas or read more information on breast cancer, including signs and symptoms. [Read more](#)

### Shave the Date: November 1st is the official start of Movember

To find out more about how you can help with the charity aimed at providing support to men's mental health and suicide prevention, prostate cancer and testicular cancer, please visit; [www.uk.movember.com](http://www.uk.movember.com)

### Board meetings

Our next board meeting will take place on 28th October 2020

## Get in touch

If you would like to get in touch with us regarding anything you have read in our newsletter or would like to be involved with any future projects please contact our engagement team at: [England.pcae@nhs.net](mailto:England.pcae@nhs.net)

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