



Rt Hon Steve Barclay MP  
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care  
Department of Health and Social Care  
39 Victoria Street  
London  
SW1H 0EU  
United Kingdom

Thursday 18 May 2023

Dear Secretary of State,

**RE: Capacity challenges in oncology departments preventing the effective delivery of cancer drugs**

As a group of cancer professional organisations, we are writing to express our serious concerns about a critical lack of capacity within oncology departments. Together with the absence of any planning measures to support departments with their increasing workload, this is preventing the delivery of timely cancer treatment and means patients may be denied access to new and innovative medicines.

Demand for cancer treatment is increasing by approximately 6-8% every year, as cancer incidence rises, and more treatments are made available on the NHS. These essential treatments are critical in improving survival rates, and any disruption in access has significant consequences for patients, the NHS, and the Government's cancer priorities.

However, a lack of equivalent investment or support for the oncology workforce means departments are failing to keep pace. They are being asked to deliver more treatment with the same staffing numbers and without supportive tools to help them achieve this.

To meet this increased demand, oncology teams are having to create capacity in ways which compromise patient safety and quality of care and increase pressure on already overworked staff. Many departments are having to make difficult decisions over whether to withhold access to approved treatments or prioritise which patients can receive treatment within a safe time at the expense of others. We know that for each month a patient is delayed from starting treatment, the risk of death increases by around 10%. These types of waits are now sadly routine.

In response to this challenge, we have developed several ambitious yet achievable recommendations for how the Government and NHS can support oncology departments. These range from quick wins such as horizon scanning or capacity planning tools to support workforce planning, to longer-term measures such as the desperately needed action to boost the oncology workforce.

We would now like to meet with you to present these solutions and demonstrate how the Government, NHS England, and healthcare professionals can work together to ensure this critical situation can be improved.



We recognise that these are challenging times but without action, patients will not receive an optimal and effective level of care, the NHS will continue to fall behind on its cancer targets, and the Government will fail to meet its national cancer ambitions.

Yours sincerely,

*Dr Tom Roques - Vice President, Clinical Oncology, Royal College of Radiologists & Consultant Oncologist, Norfolk and Norwich University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust*

*Joseph Williams - Chair, British Oncology Pharmacy Association & Specialist Cancer Pharmacist, The Christie NHS Foundation Trust*

*Professor Andrew Wardley – Executive Chair, Association of Cancer Physicians & Consultant Medical Oncologist*

*Mark Foulkes – UK Oncology Nursing Society President & Macmillan Lead Cancer Nurse and Nurse Consultant*