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NHS cancer staff called to feedback on burnout, resilience and wellbeing during COVID-19 pandemic

Researchers led by a team at The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust and funded by The Royal Marsden Cancer Charity are calling on NHS staff to answer a survey about their wellbeing during the COVID-19 crisis. Researchers say answers will provide a better understanding of how the pandemic has impacted on the wellbeing, resilience and burnout of NHS staff working in a cancer healthcare setting. The team hope the findings will help shape existing wellbeing initiatives and inform new supportive policies. The work is also supported by the NIHR Biomedical Research Centre at The Royal Marsden and The Institute of Cancer Research, London.

Those working in oncology face unique challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, which researchers fear could cause anxiety and stress amongst the workforce. Cancer patients are particularly vulnerable, with often complex treatment plans in place. Clinicians are making critical and difficult decisions daily, balancing the need to continue care, with the risks COVID-19 presents for cancer patients.

These unique stressors exist alongside professional and personal challenges that all healthcare staff face during this difficult time; working in an environment at a higher risk of COVID-19 exposure, longer hours and re-deployment into different clinical environments.

To address these issues, a team led by Dr Susana Banerjee at The Royal Marsden, working alongside psychologists from Lancaster University, are launching a national study, with funding to come from The Royal Marsden Cancer Charity, thanks to a generous donation from The Lady Garden Foundation. They are inviting all NHS staff looking after cancer patients to complete three surveys that will be released over the next year. Questions will assess burnout, resilience, well-being and coping strategies amongst staff, not just during the immediate COVID-19 pandemic period, but also in the long term. All NHS staff who work with cancer patients are invited to take part.

The second part of the study will involve in-depth interviews with NHS staff who are involved in the care of cancer patients over and beyond the COVID-19 period. Questions will ask how the virus has influenced oncology decision making and care, how staff have coped, and the level of support received, interaction with patients, and importantly what staff think would help them.

Chief Investigator, Dr Susana Banerjee, Consultant Medical Oncologist at The Royal Marsden and Reader in Women's Cancers at The Institute of Cancer Research, London, explained:

“Working in healthcare, our priority is the care and wellbeing of our patients. But when it comes to our own mental health, this is too often much lower down the list for us to address. This is an important issue in the short and long term- especially during these challenging times since the COVID-19 pandemic. We need to support all staff – not only those on the frontline – so that they remain well and committed to their work in the NHS to keep delivering world class care to our cancer patients. Wellbeing, resilience and reducing ‘burnout’ is fundamental to this”

Dr Banerjee has published and lectured on burnout and resilience for several years nationally and internationally; she has also launched a global effort as Chair of the [ESMO Resilience Task Force](#), leading an international project on burnout and wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

She highlights that The Royal Marsden has introduced several measures to support wellbeing and resilience, thanks in part to funding by The Royal Marsden Cancer Charity. She hopes the research will inform existing initiatives, and thanks the Charitable support that has enabled the research to happen:

“The NHS has a number of psychological wellbeing initiatives in place to help all staff. We need to build our knowledge of the unique challenges and reactions faced during this pandemic.

“Importantly this research has been made possible because of funding from The Royal Marsden Cancer Charity, thanks to generous donation from The Lady Garden Foundation. Not only will this help inform our support strategies during COVID19 but help prepare NHS Trusts for the future. We welcome all NHS staff working in a cancer setting to join the survey and volunteer for interviews.”

The first of three short surveys and further information about taking part will be published shortly.

It will be conducted in collaboration with Lancaster University in particular, Dr Claire Hardy from their Centre for Organisational Health and Well-Being, as Psychological Lead, and has endorsement from The Association of Cancer Physicians and British Oncology Pharmacy Association.

The Royal Marsden and the ICR have launched several critical research studies such as this at unprecedented speed, with The Royal Marsden Cancer Charity now needing to raise over £500,000 over the coming weeks to ensure support for the research studies can continue.

The Lady Garden Foundation have a long-standing relationship with the Charity, and Dr Banerjee. The Lady Garden Foundation is a national women’s health organisation, which aims to raise awareness and funds for research into, and treatment of, gynaecological cancers.

Professor David Cunningham, Consultant Medical Oncologist at The Royal Marsden and Director of the NIHR Biomedical Research Centre at The Royal Marsden and The Institute of Cancer Research, London, said: “We are uniquely placed to look at COVID-19 in a cancer setting, investigating the pandemic’s impact across a wide range of patients. These trials call upon our multidisciplinary expertise in areas such as systemic therapies, radiotherapy, circulating tumour DNA which is detectable in blood tests, surgery and holistic care.”

“Teams have been working at pace to establish studies that adhere to our usual rigorous protocol; each will have varying durations, with a focus on immediate impact through to longer term understanding of this novel virus. Importantly, with commercial, NHS and academic partners across the country, and thanks to fundraising from The Royal Marsden Cancer Charity and support from The NIHR Biomedical Research Centre we hope this research will have a national and international impact.”

Find out more about other COVID-19 research here. [INSERT LINK](#).