

Don't leave metastatic breast cancer patients in Wales behind

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 10 Hydref 2022
Petitions Committee | 10 October 2022

Reference: SR22-3596-7

Petition Number: P-06-1294

Petition title: Don't leave metastatic breast cancer patients in Wales behind

Text of petition: People living with metastatic breast cancer (MBC) in Wales are being badly let down by the system. Currently, Wales has just one dedicated secondary breast cancer clinical nurse specialist (CNS), a situation that leaves potentially hundreds of people without adequate support. We need to know how many people are living with MBC to improve services. And we want improve quality of life outcomes by raising awareness of MBC red flag symptoms.

We are calling for:

1. Every person with Metastatic breast cancer (MBC) in Wales to have access to a dedicated secondary breast cancer clinical nurse specialist.
2. A collection of data of those living and being treated for MBC in Wales.

The Committee has not yet received a response from the Welsh Government to this petition.



1. Background

There are several different types of breast cancer, which develop in different parts of the breast. In a small proportion of women, breast cancer is discovered after it's spread to other parts of the body (the cancer originated in breast tissue, then spread to other parts of the body). This is known as metastatic breast cancer (it is also referred to as secondary cancer or advanced breast cancer). It is essentially stage 4 breast cancer.

Symptoms of metastatic breast cancer

The petitioner wants to raise awareness of the symptoms of metastatic breast cancer, which may be different to early-stage breast cancer symptoms. Sometimes, there are no symptoms at all. Breast cancer most commonly spreads to the bones, brain, liver or lungs. Some of the signs that breast cancer has spread include:

- Bone pain or bone fractures due to tumour cells spreading to the bones or spinal cord
- Headaches or dizziness when cancer has spread to the brain
- Shortness of breath, chest pain and coughing caused by lung cancer
- Jaundice, nausea and swelling of the feet and hands if the cancer has spread to the liver

Treatment options for metastatic breast cancer

Treatments for metastatic breast cancer are designed to shrink tumours and slow their growth, help ease symptoms and improve quality of life. Rather than having only one treatment, most patients undergo several treatments combined to help fight the cancer. The petitioner wants “every person with metastatic breast cancer in Wales to have access to a dedicated secondary breast cancer clinical nurse specialist” to help them through their treatment.

The cancer and research charity 'Breast Cancer Now' say that:

While metastatic breast cancer cannot be cured, treatments can help control forms of the disease for some time and relieve symptoms to help people live well for as long as possible.

Data collection

[Breast Cancer Now](#) estimate that there are 35,000 people living with metastatic breast cancer in the UK. In around 5% of women, breast cancer has already spread by the time it is diagnosed.

In October 2021, NHS Wales said it would participate in the first ever **National Metastatic Breast Cancer Audit** run by the Healthcare Quality Improvement Partnership (HQIP). The Audit should provide, for the first time, accurate figures around the number of people in England and Wales living with metastatic breast cancer.

Breast Cancer Now called for the Audit in its [2019 report](#) which revealed the devastating reality of living with incurable breast cancer in the UK, with many people experiencing delays in diagnosis, struggling to access support from a specialist nurse and life-changing treatments.

The charity called on UK Governments to collect data on metastatic breast cancer to improve diagnosis, treatment, and support. [It is expected that the first insights from the Audit will be delivered in 2023](#) and that it will run for a minimum of three years.

2. Welsh Government action

The Welsh Government published its [quality statement for cancer](#) in May 2022, which describes what good quality cancer services should look like. An NHS-led cancer action plan is due to be published sometime this autumn.

A Welsh Government spokesperson is quoted in a [June 2022 Wales online article](#) stating:

We are committed to improving cancer services and outcomes in Wales, including for people with metastatic cancer. Our new cancer information system will enable better service planning for people with metastatic cancer and we are also introducing a national clinical audit that will benchmark the quality of services provided to people with metastatic breast cancer. We will work with the NHS in Wales to reinforce the need for patients to be given information on signs that their cancer has returned and will give further consideration to the role of nurses specialising in metastatic cancer.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.