

Health Social Care and Sport Committee Consideration of Evidence for Draft Budget 2021-22: Written Evidence Submitted by Cancer Research UK

Wednesday 13th January 2021

Summary

1. It is essential that the 2021-22 budget for Wales includes the cancer and diagnostic workforce as a priority area for sufficient investment to match key shortages where pressure on health and care staff will be increased due to COVID-19.
2. The 2021-22 budget for Wales must prioritise the necessary investment in facilities for cancer diagnostics such as CT and MRI machines.

Key Questions

Workforce:

- The draft budget promises an investment of £17.5m for education and training of new health professionals and ongoing support for existing staff. Will the cancer and diagnostic workforce be included as a priority area for sufficient investment to match key shortages given the increasing pressures on cancer services?

Equipment:

- Will the Welsh Government prioritise the necessary investment in facilities and equipment for cancer diagnostics, to address the lack of imaging equipment in Wales, particularly in light of the backlog caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?

Introduction

1. Cancer Research UK (CRUK) is the world's largest independent cancer charity dedicated to saving lives through research. We support research into all aspects of cancer which is achieved through the work of over 4,000 scientists, doctors and nurses. In 2019/20, we funded nearly £5m of research in Wales. Thanks to research and improvements in diagnosis and treatment, survival in the Wales has doubled since the 1970s so, today, 2 in 4 people survive their cancer. Our ambition is to accelerate progress and see 3 in 4 patients surviving their cancer by 2034.
2. International studies show that cancer survival in Wales is still behind comparable countries. Cancer is the leading cause of death in Wales with around 19,000 cases of cancer every year in Wales.ⁱ Appropriate funding and early diagnosis followed by swift access to the most effective treatment remains as important as ever to provide patients with the best chance of survival.
3. Due to the sustained strain on the health service caused by COVID-19, as of the end of September 2020, **patients on the waiting list for an endoscopy increased by 44%**, and **patients on the list for radiology had increased by 62%**.ⁱⁱ
4. For cancer survival in Wales to improve, it is essential that cancers are **diagnosed at an earlier stage** when treatment is more likely to be successful. For eight common cancers, around 80% of patients survive for ten years or more when diagnosed at an early stage (one or two). When diagnosed at a late stage (three or four), the figure drops to 25 per centⁱⁱⁱ. Treatment costs are also significantly lower when cancer is diagnosed earlier.^{iv} This requires sufficient investment in cancer diagnostic equipment to support early diagnosis.
5. Early diagnosis of cancer must be a priority for Wales in order to save more lives, particularly in the context of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. We welcome additional funding in the draft budget for NHS workforce and equipment and believe it should be directed as follows:

Cancer and Diagnostic Workforce

1. We welcome the Welsh Government's decision to increase investment by £17.5m for education and training of new health professionals and ongoing support for existing staff.
2. Welsh Government have taken welcome initial steps and made firm commitments to address NHS workforce shortages including: the new national imaging academy; Establishing HEIW; a national endoscopy plan; a health and social care strategy from HEIW and Social Care Wales; and actionable government statements of intent for pathology and imaging. But more needs to be done to meet current and future patient demand.
3. **As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, between March and September 2020, 26% fewer urgent suspected cancer referrals were made in Wales.**^v The drop in diagnoses, likely caused by a reduction in cancer referrals, has led to a growing **backlog of undiagnosed cancer patients.**
4. **Imaging services are not keeping up with demand.** Demand has increased by approximately 10% per year over the last five years, whilst the radiology workforce has increased by only 1% per year.^{vi}
5. The cellular pathology workforce is ageing in Wales with **36% of consultants retiring in the next 5 years.**^{vii}
6. Approximately **1 in 10 nurse endoscopy posts are vacant**^{viii}. Some boards have had to bring teams in from England to clear backlogs.
7. To achieve early stage diagnosis, which improves cancer survival, there needs to be sufficient diagnostic capacity. More people need tests as early diagnosis starts with GPs making more referrals when people have possible cancer symptoms, with patients visiting their GP if they have a sign or symptom of cancer, and more people taking part in screening programmes.
8. Wales is experiencing significant gaps in both diagnostic equipment and workforce. Even pre-pandemic, there were chronic shortages in the diagnostic workforce which were impacting on capacity for cancer tests. This issue has been exacerbated by the effect of the pandemic on NHS workforce absences
9. **Therefore, it is essential that 2021-22 budget for Wales includes the cancer and diagnostic workforce as a priority area for sufficient investment to match key shortages. This is particularly important in coming months, where ensuring sufficient capacity to continuing delivering cancer services where pressures on health and care staff will be increased due to COVID-19.**

Questions

- The draft budget promises an investment of £17.5m for education and training of new health professionals and ongoing support for existing staff. Will the cancer and diagnostic workforce be included as a priority area for sufficient investment to match key shortages given the increasing pressures on cancer services?
- Given the immediate and long-term impact of COVID-19 on cancer services, how does Welsh Government plan to address the shortages in the diagnostic workforce in the budget?
- What assessments has Welsh Government made of the impact of COVID-19 on cancer services and the subsequent need to prioritise the cancer and diagnostic workforce in the budget?

Equipment

1. We welcome the additional £10m of capital funding in 2021-22 to create a total investment of £20m in ensuring access to key diagnostic equipment, such as CT scanners and fluoroscopy suites.

2. To ensure **sufficient capacity in diagnostic services** where rising incidence of cancer will mean increasing demand for diagnostic tests. **This requires ensuring the availability of diagnostic equipment.**
3. **Alongside the consideration of capacity in diagnostic services, the 2021-22 budget for Wales must prioritise the necessary investment in facilities and equipment for cancer diagnostics such as CT and MRI machines.** Compounding this is a lack of imaging equipment in Wales. OECD data shows that the UK has 7 MRI units and 9 CT scanners per million people, much lower than the OECD average of 17 MRI units and 27 CT scanners.^x This gap will make it difficult to manage rising demand for diagnostic imaging, not just for cancer but a range of diseases, particularly in light of the backlog caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Questions

- Will the Welsh Government prioritise the necessary investment in facilities and equipment for cancer diagnostics, to address the lack of imaging equipment in Wales, particularly in light of the backlog caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Where rising incidences of cancer will mean increasing demand for diagnostics, will the budget account for the need for sufficient capacity in cancer diagnostic services?
- For cancer survival in Wales to improve, it is essential that cancers are diagnosed at an earlier stage. Will the budget priorities equipment for cancer diagnostics such as CT and MRI machines in order to save more lives?