

CANCER RESEARCH UK POSITION ON NHS ENGLAND'S RADIOTHERAPY MODERNISATION

BACKGROUND: CRUK'S WORK ON RADIOTHERAPY

CRUK has campaigned on radiotherapy for many years. Our 2011 'Voice for Radiotherapy' campaign led to Government launching a £23 million Radiotherapy Innovation Fund to increase IMRT provision.

In 2014, we worked with NHS England to jointly publish the 'Vision for Radiotherapy 2014-24'. This document set an ambition for how radiotherapy (RT) services in England could evolve and ensure equitable access to innovative radiotherapy across the country. A key feature of the Vision was a networked approach.

NHS ENGLAND'S RADIOTHERAPY MODERNISATION PROPOSALS

NHS England's new proposals involve the formation of new Radiotherapy Networks, which will coordinate RT across their geographies. The intention of this is to ensure consistently high-quality RT across the country.

We understand that many people interpreted these changes to mean local RT units would be closed and that a large proportion of patients would have to travel. But NHS England estimate the proposals would only affect treatment plans for between 1-3% of patients, mostly with rarer cancers, who would benefit from being treated by staff with specific expertise.

OUR ANALYSIS: WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR PATIENTS?

We see the new networked model as in line with the recommendations we made in the Vision for Radiotherapy. We hope this could reduce variation in access to innovative RT and could promote consistency in practice around the country. However, we also made several comments critiquing the proposals:

- IT infrastructure is critical to the success of the model and is at present a limiting factor in many areas. NHS England must consider ways to address this, including additional funding.
- Patients who must travel should be given adequate support to access radiotherapy. In our survey of people affected by cancer, we found that 72% would travel further to get the best quality treatment. However, having radiotherapy can be very tiring – and so having the right support is crucial.
- A networked approach could help with staff shortages, but this alone is not enough.
- The ambition to increase clinical trial recruitment by 15% is welcome, however will not happen unless additional resource is provided to support radiotherapy research.
- NHS England should commence a rolling programme of replacements for LINACs and IT upgrades, and should review the national tariff for radiotherapy.

We are therefore supportive of the overall approach; however, we know that the service is already under significant pressure and reconfigurations like these require headspace.

WHAT IS CANCER RESEARCH UK DOING NEXT?

We are asking NHS England to provide additional ringfenced funding for IT and for more clarity on how Radiotherapy Networks should coordinate services. This is our immediate priority and we're expecting further detail from NHS England about the new Networks in the next few months. In the longer term we would like to see a rolling replacement programme for Linacs and a reform of the tariff for radiotherapy.

We are also campaigning for the Government to make sure the cancer workforce is a priority in the long-term NHS plan. We know that there are already significant staff shortages and with more people being diagnosed in the future, demand is going to increase. For more information on this campaign please see <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/shoulder-to-shoulder>. **For further information please contact Rose Gray, Policy Manager on rose.gray@cancer.org.uk or 020 3469 8046.**