

Scotland faces 'significant cancer crisis'

21 May 2020



Experts have warned Scotland faces a “significant cancer crisis” due to a backlog in diagnosis and treatment.

A briefing from Cancer Research UK has urged the SNP government to set out an urgent strategy to return cancer services to pre-coronavirus levels.

The document for Holyrood’s Cross-Party Group on cancer states around 2000 urgent cancer referrals are not taking place each week because of the NHS response to Covid-19.

That’s despite the health service in England restoring cancer services nearly a month ago.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary, and co-chair of the CPG, Miles Briggs said:

“There is significant and increasing concern in the medical and cancer sector at the negative impact the ongoing pause on cancer services and screening will have on patients’ cancer outcomes in Scotland.

“It is now approaching a month since NHS England resumed pre-coronavirus cancer treatment levels; we need to see urgent action to do the same here.

“The Scottish Government must publish a plan to deal with the current backlog of operations and treatments and give everyone access to the healthcare they need before it’s too late.

“We have made good progress in recent years to save lives and improve the survivability of many cancers in Scotland.

“All that progress could be under threat if we don’t see action from SNP ministers and a cancer services and research recovery plan.”

Anas Sarwar MSP, co-chair of the CPG on Cancer, said:

“There is a risk of an unprecedented cancer crisis in Scotland.

“Cancer services in Scotland were already struggling due to major NHS staff shortages, but the COVID-19 outbreak means referrals are plummeting.

“The sad reality is that many people may die of cancer in the future because they are not receiving early treatment now.

“We urge the Scottish Government to accept the recommendations made by Cancer

Research UK and hope this month's virtual summit will chart a way forward to save lives."

Cancer Research UK, which provides the secretariat for the CPG, states in its briefing:

"It is paramount that NHS organisations, Scottish Government, healthcare professionals, charities, MSPs and others work together to help address the immediate and near-term challenges we face.

"People affected by cancer now must continue to receive the care they need, in as safe a way as possible, during this crisis.

"Attention must also be given to returning the provision of cancer care to pre-COVID-19 levels as soon as possible, again in a safe and effective way.

"Given the backlog in diagnosis and treatment we are currently seeing, this will require swift and clear action. Strong national and local leadership and a clear governance framework are paramount to ensure the return

the provision of safe and accessible cancer services in the most effective way."

It adds: "Around 2,000 urgent suspected cancer referrals are not happening each week, which could mean cancer diagnoses are being missed.

"This will likely contribute to more cancers diagnosed at a later stage, where curative treatment options are reduced.

"It is also creating an extremely worrying backlog of people that need to be assessed and we are in danger of creating another, potentially more significant cancer crisis, particularly as diagnostic services were struggling

with capacity before COVID-19."