



Chris Heaton-Harris

Member of Parliament for Daventry
House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA
Tel: 020 7219 7048

November 2023

Dear Constituent,

Thank you for contacting me about Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month, and support for people affected by pancreatic cancer. Every effort is being made to improve early diagnosis and survival rates for pancreatic cancer.

I fully recognise the urgency of Pancreatic Cancer UK's "Don't Write Me Off" campaign to ensure that the optimal care pathway for treatment is implemented. Given that the UK ranks 15th out of 16 European countries for five-year pancreatic cancer survival, more must be done to increase early diagnosis to reduce the survival gap between pancreatic cancer and other cancers. The NHS Long Term Plan set an ambition to improve these outcomes, so that 75% of all cancers can be diagnosed at stage 1 and 2 by 2028 when it is easier to treat.

This ambition will be achieved through ongoing work between the Department of Health and Social Care to increase early diagnosis and survival rates for pancreatic cancer. Through the Elective Recovery Plan, the Government is investing £2.3 billion to create more Community Diagnostic Centres which will be prioritised for cancer services.

A Faster Diagnosis Standard for cancer will be introduced so that patients who are referred urgently or identified by NHS cancer screening have a maximum 28-day wait for being told definitely whether they have cancer or not. In addition, there will be a maximum 31-day wait from a decision to treat to any cancer treatment starting for all cancer patients.

The NHS is also implementing non-specific symptom (NSS) pathways for patients who present with vague and non-site specific symptoms (including pancreatic cancer symptoms) which do not align clearly to a tumour type. The NSS programme aims to achieve full population coverage across England for NSS pathways by March 2024.



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In addition, a Major Conditions Strategy is also being developed, which will focus on improving outcomes for cancer patients over the longer term. Patient groups, like Pancreatic Cancer UK, have provided valuable insight on what it is like to live with pancreatic cancer in their response to the call for evidence to the strategy consultation. I look forward to the strategy being published in due course.

Research into less survivable cancers such as pancreatic cancer is vital to improve survival rates. The Government funds research through the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), which has allocated £3.6 million towards seven research projects into pancreatic cancer since 2016. In order that the NIHR can allocate more towards pancreatic cancer research, the Government is actively encouraging more bids from researchers.

A new pancreatic cancer clinical audit will be conducted to build the evidence to support the NHS in improving the detection of pancreatic cancer and providing more consistent access to treatments. Supported by the Royal College of Surgeons, the first outcomes of this work are expected in 2023/24.

Pancreatic enzyme replacement therapy (PERT) is an important and valuable treatment that can help those who suffer with pancreatic cancer manage the symptoms of problems with digestion and cope better with treatments, such as chemotherapy or surgery. This can have a significant impact on quality of life.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence's guidelines recommend that PERT should be considered for people with both operable and inoperable pancreatic cancer. I fully appreciate there is more work to be done to increase awareness of PERT among healthcare professionals. To this end the NHS has commissioned an audit into pancreatic cancer which will look to reduce variations in treatment and improve patient outcomes.

Data from this audit will be published in due course, and in the meantime the NHS continues to work with Pancreatic Cancer UK to raise awareness of PERT, including sharing guidance with Cancer Alliances.



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Thank you for taking the time to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Chris'.

CHRIS HEATON-HARRIS MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR DAVENTRY