

Cancer services in Wales continue to improve

The NHS in Wales is diagnosing and treating more patients for cancer within target time than ever before. An additional 1,800 people were treated within target time compared to five years ago.

Despite demand for cancer services rising at around 1.5% a year, the Annual Statement shows performance has remained stable over the past few years and there have been improvements in some areas.

The statement shows in 2016/17:

- Of these, 15,912 (93%) were treated within target. This is 1,705 (12%) more than five years ago (2011-12)
- For the first time more than 72% of people diagnosed with cancer between 2010 and 2014 survived at least one year
- The Wales cancer patient experience survey showed 93% of respondents rated their care positively
- Key workers were allocated in 86% of cases compared to 66% in 2013.

Speaking ahead of his keynote address at the Wales Cancer Conference in Cardiff, Vaughan Gething said:

“As life expectancy increases, more of us will develop cancer in our lifetime.

“Cancer has become the single biggest cause of premature death in Wales and the UK. We need to educate and support people to reduce their risk of developing cancer, by quitting smoking, improving diets and levels of physical activity, as well as reducing harmful drinking and UV exposure. We must not forget that around 4-in-10 cancers are potentially preventable.

“For people who develop cancer we need to ensure the service are there to support them and treat them. We will continue to invest in cancer services and work with the NHS to improve the quality of care and patient outcomes.

“In order to achieve this, we have been working hard to ensure that all cancer patients have timely and appropriate treatment. This has involved considerable work over recent years and the development of a new single cancer pathway.

“Today I would like to move that debate on and expect all health boards, in addition to improving performance on the two existing pathways, to start shadow reporting the new single pathway for cancer.

“The new pathway will start from the point of suspicion of cancer for all patients. If the new pathway proves to be successful and there is confidence it is a better way of measuring cancer waiting times, then our ambition is to replace the two current waiting times targets with this new single cancer pathway. We will listen carefully to patients and clinicians before making any changes.

“The proposals have been clinically led and have wide support across the clinical community. We hope the new way of measuring people’s waits for cancer treatment will help NHS bodies to improve performance, quality and the efficiency of cancer services.

“Today’s report and the announcement of the new pathway are part of our wider approach to improving cancer services. Our over-arching ambition is to close the gap in outcomes with our international peers. To achieve this, we have in place significant focus on waiting times, service reform and detecting more cancers at earlier, more treatable stages.”