

April 27, 2020

Submission to APPG for Radiotherapy

Radiotherapy solutions from Industry

Problem Statement

England's capacity, infrastructure, and health policy with respect to radiotherapy hinders access for cancer patients to high-quality care and treatment options.

The APPGRT manifesto (September 2018) and subsequent inquiry report (August 2019), documented the reforms necessary to update the outdated technology and make U.K. radiotherapy top of the line.

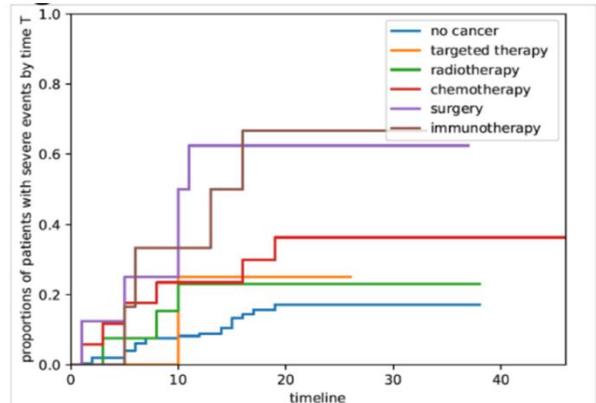
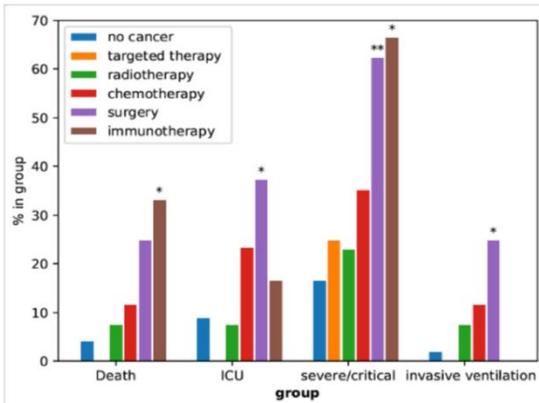
The current COVID-19 pandemic has shone a bright spotlight on the shortcomings of the system.

While oncologists, therapeutic radiographers, nurses, physicists and other healthcare professionals who make up the radiotherapy workforce are working around the clock to deliver high-quality health care, they are constrained by the limits of the current service and guidelines. Evidence has shown that radiotherapy can help treat cancer patients while reducing the risk of exposure to COVID-19 for patients and clinicians.

Evidence

Recently published articles, as well as several reports from leading cancer institutions, show that radiotherapy is the most appropriate and safest treatment option for cancer patients during the pandemic. The study from Dai et al Lancet ¹ (shown below) found that patients treated with radiotherapy for their cancer were not at increased risk of developing severe COVID-19 infections or dying of COVID-19 more than the normal population.

¹ Dai M-Y, Liu D, Liu M, Zhou F-X, Li G-L, Chen Z, et al. Patients with Cancer Appear More Vulnerable to SARS-CoV-2: A Multi-Center Study During the COVID-19 Outbreak [Internet]. 2020 [cited 2020 Apr 17]. Available from: <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=3558017>



Therefore, it is imperative for us to act now to strengthen the U.K.’s radiotherapy system to ensure that cancer patients have access to modern radiotherapy care and delivery both during and after the pandemic.

Proposed Action Plan

Industry has developed a comprehensive, wide-ranging plan to address the shortcomings and build on the strengths of the current system. Leveraging modern technology and being open to new ways of delivering and financing care can reduce treatment visits for patients, increase capacity, and deliver better and safer patient care—all while protecting medical professionals.

Together these actions will address the most critical areas identified in the APPGRT reports.

Immediate and Short-term

Immediate action should be taken with respect to information technology, transport, and NHS policy on remote services.

- Information Technology:** Health care professionals need access to Trust networks via their personal computers. In order to do this, NHS Trusts needs to open access to Trust networks for workers and change its policy to permit working from home or between Trusts. Ensuring that they have such flexibility is critical to provider and patient safety and allows cancer patients to continue necessary treatments. Technology is available to develop the IT infrastructure for radiotherapy which would allow healthcare professionals access to work from remote locations.



- Remote services: Solutions are available such as remote planning, remote monitoring management and training. Most radiotherapy systems have the capability to enable healthcare professionals to plan treatments from their homes while ensuring the safety of confidential patient information.

Medium-term

Industry stands ready to assist the government in improving the capability and capacity of radiotherapy centres.

- Infrastructure Modernization: Modern equipment is available to replace aging and inefficient machines, some of which are not fully capable of leveraging the most advanced radiotherapy techniques. With modern equipment, radiotherapy care can be delivered using substantially fewer treatment visits, in a fraction of the time—all of which will ease workforce issues.
- Health Care Professional Campaign: Once technology is updated, healthcare professionals need training. Industry can and does provide such training, most of which is done remotely, enabling us to move faster. A partnership with industry will ensure treatment teams are fully skilled in delivering an improved service.
- Patient Education Campaign: An awareness campaign centered around increasing patient knowledge of the safe, lifesaving technologies of radiotherapy is critical. Studies show that more cancer patients can benefit from radiotherapy than are currently being treated but many patients have misconceptions of the treatment. An awareness campaign will improve patient understanding and address hesitations they may have toward radiotherapy. Industry can assist with development of radiotherapy promotional materials.

