



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister's Office
10 Downing Street
London
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Tim Farron MP
House of Commons
London
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Monday 28th March 2022

Dear Prime Minister,

RE: A radical new cancer plan to clear the backlog and deliver world-class cancer care.

We urge you to work with your Ministers to ensure your Government's "war on cancer" translates into a new cancer plan that delivers world-class cancer care for all the country and tackles the COVID-induced cancer backlog and health inequalities. In particular, we urge you to boost cancer treatment capacity in technology solutions, like radiotherapy.

The cancer backlog remains unsolved. Despite the huge efforts put in by the NHS to maintain cancer services, a range of cancer experts warn the cancer backlog could be as high as 87,000-100,000 cancer patients. This is even higher than figures produced by the National Audit Office. Many cancers become incurable if left untreated, with every 4 weeks of delay leading to a 10% reduction in survival. Furthermore, regional waiting times will translate into cancer inequality across the country and tens of thousands of unnecessarily lost lives without action.

There is an urgent need to transform access to, speed, and quality of cancer care across the country. The Government's investment in diagnostics is a welcome first step. But without parallel investment to increase cancer treatment capacity, any new cancer plan will fail to deal with the cancer backlog, respond to the NHS Long term plan of increasing early-stage diagnosis, and lift the UK cancer survival off the bottom of the cancer league. If the UK is to recover the backlog and achieve the ambition of making the country's cancer care system "the best in Europe" then we need a radical new approach as well as increasing investment in workforce and technology.

For instance, radiotherapy is the perfect example of a smart investment in technology that should be at the heart of this approach and could have a dramatic impact on "catching up with cancer" and improving survival. It is needed in 4 out of 10 cures and is particularly

important for curing early-stage cancer patients. Radiotherapy is the closest thing we have to a “secret weapon” against the cancer backlog. It is COVID-safe and can substitute for surgery to reduce waiting lists. It also happens to be the most cost-effective of all the cancer treatments, curing patients for between £3-£7k. But radiotherapy is on its knees, receiving only 5% of the total cancer budget whereas other advanced economies spend over double this number. As a result, only 27% of UK cancer patients receive radiotherapy, which compares disastrously with the international standards of 53-60%. Putting investment in radiotherapy at the core of the Government’s new cancer plan will result in an immediate benefit to UK cancer patients.

We urge you to work with your Ministers to ensure the delivery of a radical new cancer plan that delivers world-class cancer care to all cancer patients in the UK no matter where they live.

Yours sincerely,

Tim Farron MP
Chair of the Radiotherapy APPG

Grahame Morris MP
Vice-Chair of the Radiotherapy APPG

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