Putting cancer patients at the heart of the General Election 2015
1. What is the problem affecting cancer patients?

Relational care such as communication, trusting nurses and being treated with dignity and respect, is essential for cancer patients. The findings of the 2013 National Cancer Patient Experience Survey\(^2\) and the Chemotherapy Experience Survey\(^3\), identify the areas where cancer patients are being let down in England.

Are cancer patients being treated with the highest levels of dignity and respect?

- 42% of patients said that not all doctors and nurses had always asked them what name they prefer to be called by.
- 31% of patients said they didn’t have confidence and trust in every ward nurse treating them.
- 30% of patients receiving chemotherapy weren’t told they had a choice about having this treatment.

Are cancer patients being given adequate support?

- 45% of patients were not definitely told about side effects of treatment that could affect them in the future before starting treatment.
- 78% of patients (almost four out of five) weren’t offered a written assessment or care plan.
- 40% of patients weren’t definitely given enough care and help from health or social services after leaving hospital.
- 46% of patients who would have liked information about how to get financial help or benefits still aren’t receiving it.
- >30% of patients receiving chemotherapy didn’t get the opportunity to talk about practical, emotional, psychological, spiritual and financial concerns.
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Evidence also suggests that there are significant inequalities in patient experience.

The following groups report poorer experiences of care:

- patients affected by rarer cancers such as urological, brain and central nervous system.
- younger patients, who tend to report more negative experiences across a number of different elements of patient experience.
- ethnic minorities, Chinese patients report the worse experiences, followed by Asian and black patients.
- women, who tend to report more critical experiences of care across most elements of experience.
- patients treated by London hospitals compared with those treated by hospitals in other English regions.

These figures show that not every cancer patient is receiving the highest levels of dignity and respect which they deserve.

‘I wish I’d had the courage to voice my fears and concerns when I was facing treatment. My partner and I would have been far better prepared emotionally to face what was to come. I had to learn the answers the hard way, as I went along.’

Simon, who was diagnosed with prostate cancer, Dorset

Percentage of patients who felt they were always treated with respect and dignity, by referring PCT.

- 44% - 53%
- 54% - 55%
- 56% - 58%
- 59% - 75%
- No data available
2. What is the problem affecting NHS staff?

Evidence suggests that staff wellbeing is the foundation on which compassionate care must be built⁷. Yet the 2013 NHS Staff Survey⁸ shows that significant proportion of staff are having a poor experience.

What are staff’s views on their place of work and management?

- 58% of staff would recommend their organisation as a place to work.
- 51% of staff haven’t received training in how to deliver a good patient/service user experience in the past 12 months.
- 41% of all staff were satisfied with the extent to which they felt their hospital trust values their work. Although 84% of staff receive appraisals, only 38% of staff said these were well structured.
- 38% said that their appraisal helped them improve how they do their job.
- 36% said communication between senior managers and staff is effective.
- 28% of all NHS staff reported that senior managers act on feedback from staff.

What are staff saying about their health and wellbeing?

- 68% of staff reported that they had attended work in the previous three months despite not feeling well enough to perform duties.
- 91% of those who’d attended work while unwell stated that they had put themselves under pressure to attend.
- 32% who’d attended work while unwell felt under pressure to attend from their manager.
- 23% who’d attended work while unwell felt under pressure to attend from other colleagues.
- 39% of NHS staff reported feeling unwell as a result of work-related stress in the past 12 months.

Macmillan’s research⁵ on this issue also shows that the treatment of hospital staff is linked to patient experience. Happy staff mean happy patients.

‘I’ve always loved coming into work. I love my job. I love that every day I come into work, even though I’m doing the same job of administering chemotherapy, we’re treating different patients every day. They’re all different – we treat them all as individuals.’

Mark, senior nurse, Hertfordshire
Conversely, where staff suffer high levels of discrimination or harassment, cancer patients are up to 18 times more likely to receive poor care.

**Results from 2014 survey with 200 healthcare professionals**

- 76% said that the government is not doing enough to support NHS staff to build a culture of care where patients are the priority.
- 93% agreed that well-treated staff treat patients well.
- 77% reported experiencing an unmanageable workload.
- 56% reported experiencing no control or influence over their work.
- 92% of the above group also said that this is a barrier to them providing a good patient experience.
- 83% said that NHS staff need more support from managers to treat cancer patients with the highest levels of dignity and respect.
- 51% of healthcare professionals said that senior leaders don’t prioritise staff health and wellbeing in their organisation.

The results from the 2014 survey of health professionals above show that NHS staff need to be supported to deliver the best possible care to cancer patients. This will also contribute towards realising Robert Francis’s vision of a common culture of care where patients are at the heart of the health service.
3. What are the solutions?

This briefing paper shows much more needs to be done to ensure all cancer patients are treated with the highest levels of dignity and respect. It also highlights that national leadership is needed to support NHS staff to deliver the best possible care to cancer patients. In light of this, Macmillan is proposing a five-point action plan:

1. The government should publish a national benchmark of cancer patient experience in hospitals trusts.

2. All trusts should be required to publish their action plans to address weaknesses in cancer patient experience and staff engagement, and report annually on their progress.

3. Commissioners and the CQC must hold trusts to account on their delivery of improvements. This should include the implementation of practical solutions to improve the experiences of patients and staff, such as the Macmillan Values Based Standard®.

4. The government should ensure NHS staff can access training and development which is vital to delivering care with dignity and respect. This could include courses on advanced communication skills training, for example the SAGE & THYME® training course, for all staff who interact with cancer patients.

5. The government should develop a set of commitments for action to support all NHS staff in delivering better care. This could be done through the six Cs programme (compassion, care, competence, communication, courage and commitment).

Help us raise standards of cancer care

We would be extremely grateful if you could write to the leadership of your party responsible for policy development raising Macmillan’s calls ahead of the General Election. Naturally, Macmillan can offer wording for this letter and provide suggested questions.

Ahead of the General Election 2015, Macmillan is also calling on political parties to commit to deliver cancer outcomes that match the best in Europe. We also want them to make sure everyone at the end of life is given free social care to support them in spending their final days in their place of choosing.
References

8. NHS. Briefing Note: Issues Highlighted by the 2013 NHS Staff Survey in England. 2013. (date accessed 13 May 2014)
9. Research Now/Macmillan Cancer Support online survey of 200 health professionals who deal with cancer patients (GPs, oncology consultants, oncology nurses, and healthcare assistants). Fieldwork conducted June 2014. Survey results are unweighted.
10. The Macmillan Values Based Standard® is a set of eight practical behaviours designed to improve the relationship between staff and patients across the NHS, which brings to life the rights in the NHS Constitution.
The UK is facing a cancer crisis. By the end of the next government’s term in 2020, almost half of us will have to face cancer sometime during our lives. And while the majority of us will receive a good standard of care, this sadly isn’t the case for everyone.

We urgently need to change this.

Our survival rates are among the worst in Europe – not least because thousands of us are diagnosed too late. And many thousands more are treated with a lack of compassion or denied the right to die where we want, with dignity. If we’re struggling to ensure everyone receives a good standard of care now, how will we cope as the number of us diagnosed with cancer grows?

Next year’s General Election is our chance to make sure the new government tackles this looming crisis. Without urgent action, not everyone with cancer will get the care that’s right for them.

No one should face cancer alone.

Help us raise standards of cancer care and make sure it is a priority for the next government.

Find out more at macmillan.org.uk/GeneralElection2015.