

Cancer Taskforce report – Achieving World-Class Cancer Outcomes - July 2015

Statement from The Royal College of Pathologists, The Institute of Biomedical Science and The Association for Clinical Biochemistry and Laboratory Medicine

As the organisations representing the majority of doctors and scientists working in pathology, we welcome the report of the [Independent Cancer Taskforce](#) and the chance to contribute to better outcomes for patients with cancer.

Pathology is the definitive diagnostic service for cancer; it is the service that handles the cells and tissues removed from suspicious ‘lumps and bumps’, identifies the nature of the abnormality and, if malignant, provides evidence to the clinician on the type of cancer, its grade and, for some cancers, its responsiveness to certain treatments.

While the report recognises the key role pathology has to play, we are concerned that the challenge of investment in skilled staff and modern equipment has been underestimated. Pathology services underpin all cancer diagnosis but are not specifically referenced in the six strategic priorities recommended by the Taskforce to help the NHS achieve world class cancer outcomes.

If we are to realise the ‘national ambition to achieve earlier diagnosis’ there will need to be a significant rethink of the pathology workforce planning process. Pathology has the potential to deliver significant savings, not through its reduction but through its full recognition and appropriate usage.

For the cancer strategy to deliver genuine benefits, advances in communication need to mirror advances in technology. The speed of result availability will only benefit patients if it is matched by increased availability of expert interpretation, which will become an even greater imperative as regional molecular diagnostic services become established and provide more personalised screening, diagnosis and treatment.

It really is time that pathology was brought in from the cold and recognised for the valuable diagnostic service it delivers and the savings that can be achieved by its early and appropriate use. The biggest impediment to the delivery of improved cancer services is the failure to recognise pathology as an integral part of the entire care pathway, from initial diagnosis, to treatment and monitoring.

Key areas of investment that are needed in pathology to enable real benefits to be achieved for cancer patients include:

1. Better and easier access to information analytics, including making data easier to share (securely) between organisations.
2. An education process to make clinicians more aware of both the appropriateness and limitations of tests including the use of the National Laboratory Medicine Catalogue (NLMC) when requesting tests.

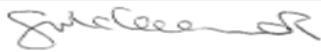
3. Developing a wide range of pathways to recruit and train staff at all levels of the scientific workforce above and beyond the current Scientist Training Programme model to produce a well-educated and flexible workforce.
4. Ensuring that investment is in place for laboratories to replace outdated equipment with modern flexible platforms that maximise throughput and reduce turn around times.
5. An investment in the pathology estate; too many laboratories still languish in old buildings that are no longer suited to modern technology or working practices.



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