

Written Response by the Welsh Government to the report of the Petitions Committee entitled Support Yearly Screening for Ovarian Cancer

March 2017

The Welsh Government recognises that ovarian cancer is the 6th most common cancer amongst women in Wales. It is most common in women who have been through the menopause (usually over the age of 50), although it can affect women of any age. As the symptoms of ovarian cancer can be similar to those of other conditions, it can be difficult to recognise.

Screening for ovarian cancer is not currently available on the NHS in Wales or elsewhere in the UK. The UK National Screening Committee (UK NSC) is an independent expert advisory committee which advises all UK Ministers and it does not currently recommend population screening for ovarian cancer. The UK NSC requires the highest-quality evidence about population benefits before a new programme is recommended. This is vitally important to ensure screening programmes do more good than harm and to ensure NHS funding and staff resources are used in the most effective way possible.

Early diagnosis of ovarian cancer is one of the most important factors in delivering a good outcome but only if it is followed by prompt access to the latest evidenced-based treatment.

Detailed responses to the report's recommendations are set out below:

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government keeps the potential for a national screening programme for ovarian cancer under review and gives detailed consideration to any new evidence which comes forward. In particular, the Welsh Government should continue to closely consider advice produced by the UK National Screening Committee.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government is represented on the UK NSC and has established a Wales Screening Committee to consider the advice and recommendations from the UK NSC in a Welsh context.

The UK NSC has recently reviewed their advice in light of the findings from the UK Collaborative Trial of Ovarian Cancer Screening (UKCTOCS) published in 2016. The UKCTOCS concluded that longer follow-up is needed to establish more certain estimates of whether later deaths from ovarian cancer could be prevented by screening and this work is underway. Any further advice from the UK NSC on ovarian cancer screening will be considered by the Wales Screening Committee and form the basis of the advice to the Welsh Government.

Financial Implications: None. The Welsh Government already contributes to the cost of running the UK National Screening Committee and funds the minimal costs associated with the Wales Screening Committee.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government continues to work with GPs and other health professionals to ensure that women who have symptoms of ovarian cancer are referred for appropriate tests and are able to receive a timely diagnosis. As part of this, we recommend that the Welsh Government supports primary care cancer leads to use the learning from the current review of ovarian cancer cases to inform GP practice and cluster plans in each health board, with a view to improving early diagnosis.

Response: Accept

Primary care teams must respond appropriately to patient presentations that may require cancer investigations. The NHS in Wales is working to implement the 2015 National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) cancer recognition and referral guideline and this is supported by GP practice-level reviews of all cases of lung, gastrointestinal and ovarian cancer in 2015 as part of the 2015-17 GP contract. Through the cancer implementation group's Framework for Cancer programme, a GP lead has been appointed in every health board to support the delivery of cancer care in Primary Care and the community setting. This includes supporting practices to embed the NICE guidelines, support referral practices and healthcare professional education.

Financial Implications: None. These activities are already funded through existing budgets.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government does more to improve public awareness of ovarian cancer, including the common symptoms and when people should seek medical advice. We believe this should build upon the short campaign run in early 2016 by Velindre NHS Trust but should learn from other successful awareness-raising campaigns and seek to raise both general and specific awareness of ovarian cancer over a prolonged period of time.

Response: Decline

Raising awareness of the signs and symptoms of cancer is important, and people with concerns are encouraged to speak to their GP. Our approach is detailed in the Cancer Delivery Plan, which was refreshed in November 2016. It includes a commitment to raise awareness of the symptoms of cancer. The Cancer Implementation Group will determine the content of this activity based on tumour prevalence and outcomes. The Wales Cancer Network has already delivered one round of national awareness raising as this was an agreed national priority area. Consideration will also be given to a more generic

cancer campaign that can focus on common warning signs or unexplained physical changes and encouraging people to seek advice from their GPs. We expect to see the Cancer Implementation Group's proposals for a rolling campaign through to 2020 later this year.

Financial Implications: None.

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