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## Joint response to Healthwatch report about cancer services

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### Joint response to Healthwatch report about cancer services

Posted on Wednesday 20th May 2015

NHS Cumbria Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay NHS Foundation Trust, (UMBHT) and North Cumbria University Hospitals NHS Trust (NCUHT) have responded to a report into Cumbria's Cancer Services by Healthwatch.

All three NHS organisations agree improvements are needed and stress that strong efforts are being made to make the necessary changes. The organisations also stress that ensuring access to high quality cancer services for people living in Cumbria is a priority for all partners within the local NHS. While the report highlights some positive experiences for patients it also shows that for some, the experience should have been better.

In relation to how long people are waiting for treatment, we know from our own monitoring of cancer waiting times – and this information is published nationally – that some improvements are needed and there are plans in place to ensure these happen. However, recent figures show that Cumbria is performing well against the national picture for referral times.

The CCG has in place Cancer lead GPs who look at all cancer diagnoses and outcomes to gather data to see how these pathways can be improved. This data is collected and provided to the Trusts so they can look at how they can improve their services.

The CCG is also co-funding with MacMillan Cancer Support to appoint specialised nurses to provide support to those diagnosed with rare forms of cancer. In addition, the CCG attends cancer survival groups in the South and North of the county where it can learn from those who have experienced cancer, whether as a patient or as relative of a patient, to again learn first-hand what needs to be done to improve the service provided. These meetings are also attended by representatives from the acute trusts, Macmillan nurses, specialised commissioners and colleagues from specialist cancer centres in the North East.

All NHS partners will be reflecting on the findings in this report in the coming weeks to consider what they need to do individually and collectively to make sure that local people have access to the best possible cancer services in the future.

Healthwatch has requested a response to its report within 20 days, and a comprehensive response will be provided which will also be published for the public to see.

Dr Hugh Reeve, Interim Chief Clinical Officer for the CCG, said: "The CCG welcomes the report and recognises some of the issues within the report. I think it is important to reassure people of our own findings which show a different and more positive picture. The CCG conducted an audit of 2,300 patients diagnosed with cancer with only 86 of those visiting their GP five or more times before being referred. Over 500 were not diagnosed through their GP but following a screening test or an emergency hospital admission.

"The CCG works closely with its partners to flag up issues regarding waiting times and how these can be improved. Our priority is to improve the health economy of Cumbria and we are working hard to instigate the changes needed to ensure delivery of robust, safe, high quality and affordable services. The key message here is that early diagnosis is vital in the fight against cancer and we need to ensure our clinical staff are trained in recognising symptoms. We will be working with Healthwatch and our partners to encourage people to attend screenings when requested and to see a GP if they feel they have symptoms of cancer."

Sue Smith, Executive Chief Nurse at UMBHT, said: "University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay NHS Foundation Trust welcomes Healthwatch Cumbria's 'Review of Cancer Services' report and we would like to thank them for their hard work in producing this report.

"We are pleased that areas such as respect, dignity and providing information received such high scores at all our hospitals in the report.

“We continue to improve and all our cancer targets have been hit in the last three months however, there are some areas of concern which show us we need to make further changes to improve.

“We will study the report in detail and report back to Healthwatch Cumbria on the recommendations within the given timescales”.

Nicky Moon, deputy director for clinical support and cancer services at North Cumbria University Hospitals NHS Trust, said:

“Receiving a cancer diagnosis and undergoing treatment can be a very difficult time for patients and their families and our aim is always to provide the highest quality of compassionate care.

“As part of our focus on continuous improvement, we are always actively listening to what our patients are telling us about their experiences of care in our hospitals and welcome all sources of feedback about our services.

“We have been very open and honest about the challenges we have faced around cancer waiting times and are continuing to work very hard to make sure patients are seen as quickly as possible and in line with national standards.”

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