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Ymchwiliad i'r Adolygiad Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer y Pwyllgor Iechyd, Gofal  
Cymdeithasol a Chwaraeon

Inquiry into the Priorities for the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee

Ymateb gan: Breast Cancer Now

Response from: Breast Cancer Now



Health, Social Care and Sport Committee  
National Assembly for Wales  
Pierhead Street  
Cardiff  
CF99 1NA

2 September 2016

To whom it may concern,

**Re: Priorities for the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee – response from Breast Cancer Now**

Breast Cancer Now welcomes the opportunity to comment on priorities identified for 2016-17 for the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee.

Breast Cancer Now is the UK's largest breast cancer charity, dedicated to funding ground-breaking research into the disease. Our ambition is that, by 2050, everyone who develops breast cancer will live. We are bringing together all those affected by the disease to improve the way we prevent, detect, treat and stop breast cancer. We are committed to working with the NHS and governments across the UK to ensure that breast cancer services are as good as they can be, and that breast cancer patients benefit from advances in research as quickly as possible.

This response focuses on the priorities already identified by the Committee that we believe are particularly relevant to breast cancer patients in Wales, namely, waiting times and sport and public health.

**Waiting times**

We are pleased to see that the Committee has prioritised waiting times, including cancer waiting times. Breast Cancer Now has long been concerned about the length of time that women presenting to their GP with breast symptoms are waiting to be seen by a specialist following referral by their GP.

Work undertaken by Breast Cancer Now (at the time Breakthrough Breast Cancer) in 2013 and again in 2015 revealed unacceptably long referral waiting times for patients with breast symptoms, as well as significant variation in waiting times between Health Boards.

FOI requests made by Breast Cancer Now in 2015 showed that at one Health Board, patients who were referred urgently with suspected breast cancer could expect to wait, on average, 43 days before being seen by a specialist. For patients referred non-urgently (i.e. where cancer is not



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**Breast Cancer Now** is the UK's largest breast cancer charity, created by the merger of Breast Cancer Campaign and Breakthrough Breast Cancer.

Breast Cancer Now is a company limited by a guarantee in England (No.9347608) and a charity registered in England and Wales (No.1160558) and in Scotland (SC045584). Registered Office: Fifth Floor, Ibex House 42-47 Minorities, London EC3N 1DY.





suspected but investigation is still required), waiting times at some Health Boards could be over 15 weeks<sup>1</sup>.

Clearly in these circumstances, diagnosis is not happening rapidly and there is a danger that the delay after referral could have a negative impact on outcomes and survival. There is also the additional issue of the worry and distress caused to patients by having to wait many weeks or months to see a specialist, regardless of the outcome.

While there is a 'Ministerial expectation' that women referred with urgent suspected breast cancer should be seen within 10 working days from the day of referral by their GP – this is not an official Government target and is therefore not reported on publicly.<sup>2</sup>

The lack of public reporting on the 'Ministerial expectation' makes it difficult to scrutinise and measure Health Boards' achievement of this unofficial target. A recent FOI request by the Welsh Liberal Democrats also revealed that at some Health Boards, the majority of those urgently referred are not seen within 10 working days<sup>3</sup>.

For patients referred non-urgently there is no such expectation for them to be seen within 10 working days. As already mentioned, they can wait many weeks or even months before being seen by a specialist.

**We urge the Committee to conduct an inquiry into the current status of the 'Ministerial expectation' to establish whether this is being routinely met across Wales and if it should be extended to patients referred non-urgently.**

The proposed Single Cancer Pathway that has been piloted in Wales fails to address the problems of non-urgent referrals and would not change the current position where a person referred non-urgently could wait many weeks before being seen by a specialist.

It is also important to realise that it is not an insignificant number of patients who will be diagnosed with cancer following a non-urgent referral. Between April 2011 and March 2012 Breast Cancer Now estimate that non-urgent referrals made up around 36% of people diagnosed with breast cancer (excluding those diagnosed through routine breast screening). An answer from First Minister's Questions in September 2015<sup>4</sup> suggested that the number of people diagnosed with breast cancer through the non-urgent route was even higher, with more patients diagnosed through this route than the urgent route.

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<sup>1</sup> We would be happy to provide full details of the FOI responses to the Committee.

<sup>2</sup> *National Standards for Breast Cancer Services*. Welsh Assembly Government, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-35778888>

<sup>4</sup> (OAQ(4)0625(HSS))



**We therefore urge the Committee to take any available opportunity to question the First Minister and the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Well-being and Sport on waiting times for patients with breast symptoms, specifically regarding the progress of the Single Cancer Pathway Pilot and when the interim report from this pilot will be published.**

## **Sport and Public Health**

Breast Cancer Now is encouraged to see that the Committee is prioritising sport and public health. In 2012, one of Breast Cancer Now's legacy charities, Breakthrough Breast Cancer, conducted an evidence review around physical activity and breast cancer risk, gaining the consensus of experts regarding the amount and intensity of physical activity required to significantly reduce breast cancer risk. The evidence highlighted that regular physical activity can reduce your risk of developing breast cancer by at least 20 per cent<sup>5</sup>. 'Regular' physical activity refers to undertaking at least 3.5 hours of moderate intensity activity per week, equivalent to 30 minutes or more per day. Nearly 9000 cases of breast cancer could be prevented every year in the UK if all women were regularly physically active<sup>6</sup>. To support this work, Breast Cancer Now has developed a web resource to enable women to track their activity and visually see the risk reducing impact physical activity can have. This web tool is available at <http://brisk.breastcancer.org/>.

Another key public health concern which has an impact on breast cancer is alcohol consumption. The results of the Welsh Health Survey<sup>7</sup> revealed that 40% of adults in Wales reported drinking above recommended guidelines on at least one day in the past week, with 24% reporting drinking more than twice the daily guidelines. Regularly drinking any amount of alcohol can increase the risk of developing breast cancer, and that risk increases the more that is regularly drunk. For every 100 women who drink one typical drink per day (two units such as 1 pint of lager or a 175ml glass of wine) there will be an extra two women who develop breast cancer compared with 100 women who do not drink at all.

**We hope to see alcohol consumption and physical activity explicitly referred to in the work-plan developed by the Committee and we would welcome a focus on the impact of these factors on the risk of developing cancer, as well as other health issues.**

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<sup>5</sup> <http://breastcancer.org/sites/default/files/public/physical-activity-and-breast-cancer-risk.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Lee I-M, Shiroma EJ, Lobelo F, Puska P, Blair SN, Katzmarzyk, for the Lancet Physical Activity Series Working Group. Effect of physical inactivity on major non-communicable diseases worldwide: an analysis of burden of disease and life expectancy. The Lancet. Published online 18 July 2012: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(12\)61031-9](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(12)61031-9)

<sup>7</sup> <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/welsh-health-survey/?lang=en>

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Committee's priority areas for the next 12-18 months. If you wish to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact me on [REDACTED] or by email on [REDACTED].

Yours sincerely,

Sally Greenbrook  
Policy Manager



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