

Gateway Ref - 18425

6 December 2012

To: All Trust Chief Executives
All Primary Care Trust Chief Executives

*Department of Health
Room 6B,
Skipton House
80 London Road,
London,
SE1 6LH*

Copied to:

NHS Foundation Trust Chief Executives
Cancer Network Directors
Strategic Health Authority Cancer Leads
Strategic Health Authority Directors of Performance

Dear Colleague,

Cancer Decision Support Tools

I am writing to inform you of a key initiative starting early in 2013 to support GPs in the earlier diagnosis of patients with cancer.

Macmillan Cancer Support, with DH funding will be piloting the use of an electronic cancer decision support tool as part of GPs' routine practice. These tools are designed to assess the risk of a patient having an existing, undiagnosed cancer and will help GPs assess patients with possible cancer more effectively. The initial pilot will cover lung, colorectal, pancreatic, ovarian and oesophago-gastric cancers.

The pilot will fully roll out from March 2013 for six months, working with a number of cancer networks and will gather evidence for their use as an aid to clinical decision-making and patient management. Cancer networks and local clinical commissioning groups are supporting this project and recruiting GPs in their area. A list of the participating areas is attached for your information (Annex A).

An earlier study led by the National Cancer Action Team showed increases in referrals to secondary care and diagnostic tests and evidence of an increase in the number of cancers diagnosed and numbers diagnosed at an earlier stage of disease for bowel and lung.¹

Clinical and project leads from each of the participating networks will want to discuss the project with their local secondary care providers, including any additional demand and will be seeking cooperation to manage any increases, such as for diagnostic investigations and outpatient appointments via the two week wait referral

¹ The study was observational and the authors stress that the extra diagnoses cannot be assumed to be caused by GPs using the risk assessment tools.

pathway. Leads will also wish to discuss how to manage any potential differences between the referral criteria and those indicated in the decision support tool.

The aim of this project is to develop useful tools with a sound evidence base that could be considered for wider rollout in the future. I trust you will be able to support this initiative and help ensure that GPs have the best possible tools available to them to detect cancer early. If you have any queries or comments about this work please email Jennifer.Benjamin@dh.gsi.gov.uk or Thomas.Thomas.White@dh.gsi.gov.uk in the DH Cancer Team.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mike Richards', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mike Richards
National Cancer Director

Annex A: List of participating areas

Medway PCT

Dorset Cancer Network

East Midlands Cancer Network

Essex cancer Network

Greater Manchester and Cheshire Cancer Network

Lancashire and South Cumbria Cancer Network

Cheshire and Merseyside Clinical Networks

North East London Cancer Network

North East Yorkshire and Humber Clinical Alliance

North Central London and West Essex Cancer Commissioning Network

North of England Cancer Network

North Trent Cancer Network

Cancer Commissioning Network – North West and South

Pan Birmingham Cancer Network

South East London Cancer Network

South West London

Sussex Cancer Network