



Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP
Secretary of State
Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

Dear Secretary of State,

I have been contacted by a number of my constituents concerning the urgent need for 'COVID-protected' cancer hubs to be consistently delivered across the country. People affected by cancer and those that support them must be given the confidence that they will receive the help they need when they need it most.

Both my constituents and I are gravely concerned that, right now, thousands of cancer patients are having their diagnostic tests and treatment altered, delayed or even stopped because of the virus. Consequently, I have lent our support to Cancer Research UK's '*Safe Spaces for Cancer Services*' campaign.

We do this with an awareness that the UK has already set out welcome guidelines stating that urgent and essential cancer care must continue and led on the establishment of 'COVID-protected' spaces for cancer surgery in some areas. These efforts are vital to reinstate care safely, as emerging data suggests a higher rate of serious complications and/or death for cancer patients following COVID-19 infection, particularly for those with late-stage metastatic disease.

Unfortunately, despite many 'COVID-protected' cancer hubs being set up, worries remain that patients are still at risk of infection from asymptomatic healthcare workers and patients. The Government's announcements on May 6th and May 21st that all medical staff are to be tested weekly, and that all NHS staff and patients will be eligible for antibody testing, are important in this regard and will become more so as lockdown measures are relaxed further.

However, both my constituents and I are very concerned that testing is not happening at the pace or scale required and that no detailed testing strategy for cancer services is in place to guide action or evaluate effectiveness.

Cancer patients can't wait for the pandemic to pass before getting the vital diagnosis and treatment they need.

As you recognised in establishing a target of 75% of cancers being diagnosed early by 2028, it is still the case that early diagnosis followed by swift access to the most effective treatments is as important as ever to saving lives. As Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, you have the power, and the responsibility, to make sure all cancer patients are given the best chance of survival.

My constituents and I are therefore calling on you to extend the provision of 'COVID-protected' cancer hubs across England and ensure there are safe spaces for cancer services to run to full capacity.

To create truly safe spaces protected against COVID-19 infection you must:

1. Set a robust strategy for rolling out testing amongst patients and healthcare workers, setting out the order of priority of different parts of the service. Staff and patients in COVID-protected spaces must be identified as high priority so that cancer services can be delivered in environments as far as possible free from COVID-19.
2. Maintain clear guidance for establishing COVID-protected spaces. This should cover protocols for testing staff and patients, set out requirements for patients to self-isolate before elective procedures, and set out the need to track exposure to individuals (staff or patients) who test positive for COVID-19.
3. Where testing is already happening, ensure access at the point of care is widely available with a rapid turnaround for results (within hours, rather than days), and expand NHS testing capacity so that healthcare workers can be tested at least twice a week, but ideally more.
4. Monitor and report weekly on testing rates amongst staff and patients based in COVID-protected cancer hubs – to ensure this approach is followed consistently across the country.
5. Ensure that there is an adequate supply of PPE for all cancer workforce staff, to protect them from infection and the risk of contaminating COVID-protected cancer hubs.

Only by taking these steps will patients and healthcare staff be able to feel confident that cancer services are safe for vulnerable cancer patients.

So, on behalf of my constituents, I ask that you act now to protect cancer patients, by publicly backing the expansion of COVID-protected cancer hubs and actively implementing the recommendations made by Cancer Research UK.

In time, these changes must also be supported with action to resolve long-term problems such as NHS staffing for cancer diagnosis, an issue raised by Cancer Research UK's *Shoulder to Shoulder Against Cancer* campaign prior to the pandemic. But this immediate action, to secure safe spaces for cancer services, will be a significant first step that will reduce the anxieties for patients, reassure NHS staff, and ultimately help save lives.

For the sake of all the people affected by cancer, I implore you to resolve this urgent issue. On the 30th April the Prime Minister stated, "when it comes to urgent cancer care, people will get the treatment that they need" – now we would like to see this commitment delivered, and delivered in safe spaces for cancer diagnosis and treatment.

Yours sincerely,