

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Iechyd a Gofal Cymdeithasol](#) ar [Effaith yr ôl-groniad o ran amseroedd aros ar bobl yng Nghymru sy'n aros am ddiagnosis neu driniaeth](#)

This response was submitted to the [Health and Social Care Committee](#) consultation on the [impact of the waiting times backlog on people in Wales who are waiting for diagnosis or treatment](#)

WT 18

Ymateb gan: | Response from: Target Ovarian Cancer

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## Target Ovarian Cancer

### Health and Social Care Committee- Impact of the waiting times backlog on people in Wales who are waiting for diagnosis or treatment

#### Impact of Coronavirus pandemic on ovarian cancer

Over 300 women are diagnosed with ovarian cancer each year in Wales and more women die as a result of ovarian cancer each year in the UK than all other gynaecological cancers combined.<sup>1</sup>

The earlier a woman is diagnosed the greater her chances of surviving. 97 per cent of women diagnosed at stage 1 are expected to survive one year or more, compared to just 43 per cent of those diagnosed at stage 4.<sup>2</sup>

The pandemic has had a drastic impact on urgent referrals for suspected cancer from GPs and treatment wait times. Early diagnosis and beginning treatment as soon as possible are key in increasing the survival rates among women with ovarian cancer.

In 2017 the Welsh Assembly Petitions Committee produced a report calling for public-facing ovarian cancer awareness campaign in Wales<sup>3</sup>. To date there has been no specific awareness campaigns on ovarian cancer. This is despite there being low levels of awareness of the symptoms of ovarian cancer in Wales. Target Ovarian Cancer found that only 15 per cent of women in Wales would make an urgent GP appointment if they were to experience the symptom of persistent bloating.<sup>4</sup> With no effective screening tool for ovarian cancer, it is vital that everyone is aware of the symptoms if ovarian cancer is to be diagnosed early.

The pandemic has had a significant impact on early diagnosis and treatment of ovarian cancer, with 25 per cent of women who were diagnosed from March 2020 onwards reporting delays with GP appointments. Target Ovarian Cancer also found that 23 percent of women diagnosed with ovarian cancer in Wales reported disruption to treatment in the first wave and 8 per cent in the second wave.<sup>5</sup>

In light of these delays, action needs to be taken to ensure everyone diagnosed with ovarian cancer has the best possible chance of survival. A shorter diagnostic pathway with the CA125 blood test and ultrasound being carried out at the same time rather than sequentially, would allow women to be diagnosed faster. There needs to be a government-backed symptoms awareness campaign and a commitment to improving diagnosis of rare and less common cancers.

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<sup>1</sup> Welsh Cancer Intelligence and Surveillance Unit. Available at: [https://publichealthwales.shinyapps.io/Cancer\\_incidence\\_in\\_Wales\\_2001-2017/](https://publichealthwales.shinyapps.io/Cancer_incidence_in_Wales_2001-2017/)

<sup>2</sup> Welsh Cancer Intelligence and Surveillance Unit Cancer survival by stage of diagnosis. Available at: [www.wcis.u.wales.nhs.uk/cancer-survival-by-stage-at-diagnosis-in-1](http://www.wcis.u.wales.nhs.uk/cancer-survival-by-stage-at-diagnosis-in-1)

<sup>3</sup> Petitions Committee Support Yearly Screening for Ovarian Cancer – Report on the Consideration of a Petition, National Assembly for Wales. Available at: <https://senedd.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld10927/cr-ld10927-e.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Target Ovarian Cancer, YouGov survey. February 2021

<sup>5</sup> Target Ovarian Cancer, survey on the impact of the pandemic. January 2021

## Support

After diagnosis, it is imperative that the right support is in place to help women and their families through the next stages. However, the pandemic has seen delays in diagnosis and treatment, being told your treatment has been delayed can be distressing for anyone diagnosed with cancer. It is key that everyone diagnosed with ovarian cancer has access to a Clinical Nurse Specialist who can provide support and advice whilst waiting for treatment to begin.

The uncertainty around treatment and the disruption with the introduction of shielding has led to over half of women saying the pandemic has had a negative impact on their mental health. This has been compounded by a reduction in the support available, with 15 per cent of women unable to access the same care and support as before the pandemic. There has also been significant difficulty in accessing Clinical Nurse Specialists who are a vital source of support and information with 38 per cent of women not having the same level of access as before the pandemic.<sup>6</sup>

We need a clear strategy on how support services will recover and need to ensure that we continue to improve upon the level of support and care available prior to the pandemic.

### **The contribution the third sector can make in providing peer support and information to patients waiting on an NHS waiting list**

Charities are key to providing information and support to those diagnosed with cancer. Target Ovarian Cancer offer a support line for anyone affected by ovarian cancer. The support line is there for anyone who wants to discuss symptoms, if they have a diagnosis, or if they are a family member or friend supporting someone living with ovarian cancer.

The impact of Covid-19 on women with ovarian cancer cannot be underestimated. With face-face events ending and treatment being postponed we saw demand for our support line increase by 22 per cent.<sup>7</sup> Our dedicated support team ensured that throughout the pandemic everyone could access our supportive services, including making support events available online.

## Ovarian Cancer Audit

### **The extent to which inequalities exist in the elective backlog, with deprived areas facing disproportionately large waiting lists per head of population compared to least deprived areas.**

Target Ovarian Cancer welcomed the announcement from NHS England that a full clinical audit to improve ovarian cancer care and treatment across England will be commissioned and that this audit will be extended to Wales.

This audit will play a crucial role in transforming diagnosis and access to treatment for everyone diagnosed, irrespective of their age or where they live.

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<sup>6</sup> Target Ovarian Cancer, survey on the impact of the pandemic. January 2021

<sup>7</sup> Target Ovarian Cancer Annual report 2019-20

<https://targetovariancancer.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-12/Target%20Ovarian%20Cancer%20annual%20report%20and%20accounts%20to%2030%20June%202020.pdf>

## **Recovery from the Pandemic**

When addressing the impact of coronavirus on the backlog, Target Ovarian Cancer believe the following should be prioritised in order to begin recovering from the impact the pandemic has had across cancer services in Wales:

- An awareness campaign across Wales on the symptoms of ovarian cancer. To help increase knowledge of the symptoms of ovarian cancer to encourage women to contact their GP as soon as they experience symptoms
- Wales needs a shorter diagnostic pathway for ovarian cancer
- Plans for the recovery of cancer services must include a focus on support services.