

PETER GIBSON MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

June 2021

Dear Constituent

Thank you for your email about cancer treatment during the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.

When people start treatment for cancer, their medical team works with them to balance the risks and benefits of treatment before agreeing a plan. As a result of the pandemic, it may be that doctors consider the risks of certain treatments, particularly those that weaken the immune system, to be much greater than normal. They will take into consideration how urgent your treatment is: in some cases, delaying treatment might not make a big difference to the outcome. Patients with cancer visit hospitals regularly, but for those who are particularly vulnerable, this is more risky than usual as it may result in exposure to the virus.

I was delighted when it was announced that NHS services could begin restarting from April, starting with the most urgent, like cancer care and mental health support. The NHS is open for business, even during this time of additional restrictions, and anyone who needs care and treatment should continue to access it as and when they need it, especially when delays could impose both an immediate and a long term risk to health.

In particular I welcome that the Government has already announced £3 billion funding to support the NHS recovery from COVID-19, to help to ease existing pressures and enable hospitals to carry out extra checks, scans, and other operations or procedures. This will help to ensure that cancer patients are able to access the care that they need as safely and quickly as possible. This was reiterated as part of the Spring Budget 2021, and I firmly support the Government's ongoing commitment to the NHS and the vital service it provides, during normal times as well as the pandemic.

I know that continuation of cancer services is absolutely vital in many cases, which is why I welcome that restarting cancer care in a safe manner has been a priority for the NHS and for the Government. I welcome that, due to COVID-19, the 21 cancer alliances in England have established hubs to ensure dedicated cancer care away from hospitals dealing with the virus.

Member of Parliament for Darlington

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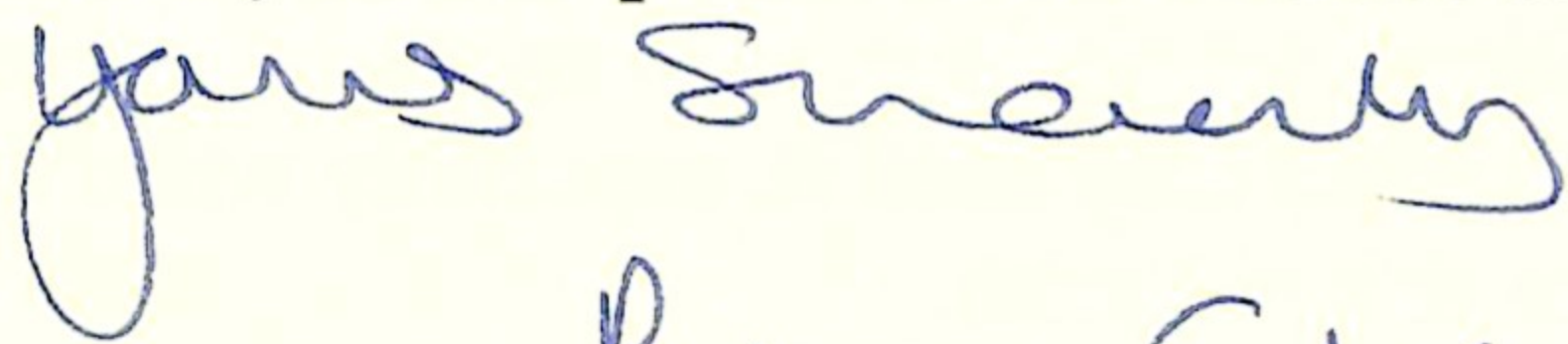

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I want to assure you that cancer is a priority for the Government and survival rates are at a record high. I understand that since 2010 rates of survival from cancer have increased year-on-year. Around 7,000 people are alive today who would not have been had mortality rates stayed the same as then. I agree that we need to keep working on this, which is why I welcome the Government's stated aim to see three quarters of all cancers detected at an early stage by 2028 (currently just over half are detected at an early stage). The plan will overhaul screening programmes, provide new investment in state of the art technology to transform the process of diagnosis, and boost research and innovation. This is part of the NHS Long Term Plan (LTP), published in January 2019, and forms part of how the Government will achieve its ambition to see 55,000 more people surviving cancer for five years in England each year from 2028. I will continue to support the Government and the NHS to deliver on this, in spite of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

One of the measures outlined in the LTP is safer and more precise treatment, including advanced radiotherapy techniques and immunotherapies to continue to support improvements in survival rates. This will be supported by a £130 million upgrade of radiotherapy machines across England, as well as commissioning the NHS new state-of-the-art Proton Beam facilities in London and Manchester. In addition, the LTP commits to reforms to the specialised commissioning payments for radiotherapy hypofractionation to support further equipment upgrades. Faster, smarter and effective radiotherapy, supported by greater networking of specialised expertise, will mean more patients are offered curative treatment, with fewer side effects and shorter treatment times. Starting with ovarian cancer, the NHS will ensure greater access to specialist expertise and knowledge in the treatment of cancers where there are fewer or more risky treatment options.

Once again, thank you for taking the time to contact me and if I can ever be any further assistance to you then please do not hesitate to contact me again.

PETER GIBSON MP