

Alliance Newsletter

Connecting and empowering the delivery of cancer care across our communities.

Issued Monday 14 April 2025

A message from our Executive Chair



Firstly, I want to say a huge thank you to everyone for your efforts in the past year, and as we finish one financial year and enter another, I want to reflect on our great progress and look ahead with optimism.

We have seen continued improvement in many areas, particularly in improved waiting times for cancer tests and treatment over the year, despite increasing referrals into some pathways and several well recognised challenges.

Progress is being made in the rollout of teledermatology services, where patients with suspected skin cancer can have concerning skin lesions reviewed remotely, without needing to make a face-to-face appointment.

A Non-Specific Symptoms (NSS) pathway has been commissioned by all four Integrated Care Boards to ensure the continuation of a pathway for patients who have non-specific but concerning symptoms of possible cancer. The psychological care and support mapping project has been completed, highlighting recommendations for us to work together to make improvements to enable more equitable support and high-quality care is available to people living with cancer across our region.

We were also delighted to be selected to join two other Cancer Alliances in England to begin a pancreatic case finding pilot in primary care.


I was also thrilled to open this year's annual conference, where nearly 200 clinicians and partners gathered to discuss how we can collectively support aims for earlier cancer diagnosis and improve outcomes. Thank you to all who contributed to making it such a successful event and for all the contributions from across SWAG to share local projects and successes.

Recent NHS announcements and future cancer priorities

- A number of announcements took place in the last month which will impact some of our partner organisations, and colleagues within those organisations, including NHS England,

Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) and providers. We are currently reviewing how we can best support partner organisations and colleagues during this difficult period and to ensure that cancer improvement remains a priority despite these challenges. Though cancer alliances are funded directly by NHS England, we have not been informed of any changes to how we operate and we will continue to focus on our 2025/26 priorities:

- Improving waiting times for individuals to receive a diagnosis and start treatments.
- Increasing the early detection of cancers and addressing health inequalities.
- Improving patient access to treatment and reducing variation in treatment.
- Ensuring individuals are adequately supported throughout their treatment and beyond.



In order to address these priorities, we will continue to work with our stakeholders, including the communities we serve. To ensure we have the most impact, we will be using a targeted and evidence-based approach to investment and improvement plans. We will also ensure we maximise our impact through the most up-to-date technology and innovations and build on successful initiatives, such as the cancer vaccine launch pad, so that patients have the best chance of beating cancer.

Thank you, as always, for your continued dedication and hard work and please continue to do the excellent things you are doing every day for our patients.

Maria Kane

Executive Chair, SWAG Cancer Alliance | Joint Chief Executive, North Bristol NHS Trust and University Hospitals Bristol and Weston NHS Foundation Trust



Almost 200 delegates attend SWAG's Annual Conference



We were really pleased to be joined by almost 200 people at the second annual conference for the SWAG Cancer Alliance on 19 March.

SWAG focused on how organisations in the alliance can accelerate the region's Earlier Diagnosis Strategy and deliver the NHS Long Term Plan ambition of '75% of cancers diagnosed at Stage 1 and 2 by 2028'.

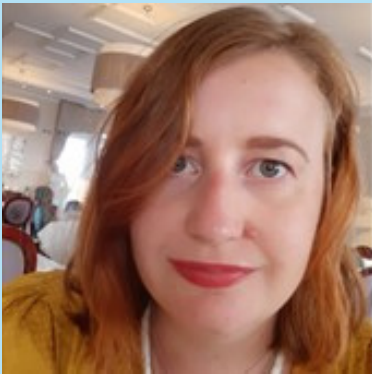
The event was opened by our Executive Chair Maria Kane, and brought together people who are committed to improving early cancer diagnosis to foster a shared sense of purpose and provide access to the data, relationships, and skills needed to achieve this.

The event was led in partnership with local voluntary and community organisations to focus on diversity and inclusion for patients, families, communities, and all those working in health and social care.

Thanks to everyone involved in organising the conference and all who attended on the day.



Introducing our Programme Manager for Cancer Innovation - Becky Clack



Becky has been with the SWAG Cancer Alliance for nine months in a newly created, joint role and partnership with the Health Innovation West of England Network.

She has ample experience within cancer services having worked nationally, regionally, and locally. Becky's focus is to bring new innovations into the cancer pathways to drive an improvement of cancer outcomes, streamline processes, and reduce inequalities.

Since starting in post, Becky has designed and led a SWAG innovation funding open-call with a focus on early diagnosis. We received multiple, varied applications and selected seven exciting projects to fund, with independent evaluations, which will all run over the next 18 months.

Becky is leading the development of our SWAG Innovation Strategy with a focus on creating a culture of innovation to ensure our workforce feels fully supported and confident to implement new innovations into cancer pathways. She will be running webinars throughout April for stakeholder engagement so if you'd like to learn more, and input into the strategy, please do join one of these sessions. Dates will be sent out soon. If you'd like to get in touch with Becky to discuss all things innovation, please do email her on beckyclack@nhs.net.



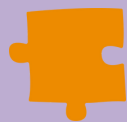
Inaugural Clinical Leadership Forum



On 28 February 2025, we launched our inaugural Clinical Leadership Forum at Armada House in Bristol, bringing together clinical leaders from multiple professions working in cancer.

The forum was established to bring together a network of empowered and ambitious clinical leaders, who are committed to providing excellence in cancer care delivery for all patients in the SWAG Cancer Alliance footprint and beyond. The forum helps to recognise that clinical leadership is critical in driving improvements and ensuring the workforce delivering care feels valued, is appropriately skilled and empowered. The event gave the opportunity to discuss priorities and to socialise and implement our SWAG Clinical Leadership Framework and Strategy. All attendees were interested in joining another event in the future

Thanks to all those who joined, we look forward to seeing you again in the Autumn!



Early Diagnosis Project Spotlight - Mendip Primary Care Network (PCN) Trans Awareness Project

The collaboration between Mendip PCN and The Diversity Trust represents a vital initiative designed to address the barriers that Transgender and Gender-Diverse (TGD) individuals face when trying to access cancer screenings and healthcare services.

To better understand these barriers and identify potential solutions, we developed a questionnaire focused on healthcare access and cancer screening. This survey was distributed during Trans Pride Bristol, encouraging open conversations and gathering valuable insights. In addition to the questionnaire, we provided Trans Awareness training to GP practices, helping healthcare professionals become more attuned to the needs of TGD individuals. This initiative directly supports national strategic priorities, particularly the CORE20PLUS5 group and efforts towards early diagnosis and screening.

Results

The responses from the questionnaire, as well as the feedback collected from the Vox Pop, highlighted key areas for improving healthcare for TGD individuals. Common themes included the need for better access to shared care, reduced wait times, and the importance of using correct pronouns. Among the respondents, a significant number (31) were unaware of how to properly self-check for cancer, although many indicated they would turn to the NHS website for guidance on self-examination.

What's next

Looking ahead, we plan to implement several initiatives aimed at further improving healthcare access for TGD individuals. These include appointing a Transgender Champion in local surgeries, creating a chaperone bank trained in trauma-informed care and TGD-specific issues, and developing a more appropriate healthcare needs assessment. Additionally, we will continue collaborating with the NHS and local partners to increase screening uptake within the transgender community.

Written by Abby Harrington, Care Coordinator for Population Health and Medicine Management



Other Stories

Retrospective cancer genetics testing programme pilot

A retrospective Genetic Testing Programme began with a pilot launch in March.

Contact swagca@nbt.nhs.uk to find out more.

Addressing Health Inequalities - socio-economic deprivation

Recent analyses by Cancer Research UK published in February have highlighted significant disparities in cancer outcomes. [Read more.](#)

Improving cancer pathways: challenges, overcoming barriers and digital solutions

Participants explored the key challenges and opportunities that exist within cancer pathways, from before diagnosis through to treatment and beyond during a national Public Policy Projects roundtable. [Read more.](#)

Cancer Vaccine Launch Pad

The NHS Cancer Vaccine Launch Pad (CVLP) is a groundbreaking platform designed to accelerate access to cutting-edge messenger ribonucleic acid (mRNA) personalised cancer vaccine clinical trials for individuals diagnosed with cancer. [Read more.](#)



Events and Resources

Pancreatic Case Finding

Starts April 2025

We are pleased to announce that SWAG has been selected to take part in the national Pancreatic Case Finding pilot, starting in April. [Find out more.](#)

National Cancer Plan consultation

Started 4 February 2025

A new National Cancer Plan is being developed. [Please have your say.](#)

Bowel Cancer Awareness Month

April 2025

Join us and help promote Bowel Cancer Awareness Month. [Find out more.](#)



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