HEE unveils plan to transform the future NHS cancer workforce

5 December 2017

Health Education England (HEE) has today launched a comprehensive cancer workforce plan that sets out how it will make sure the NHS has enough staff with the right skills to deliver improvements for people affected by cancer over the next three years.

The Cancer Workforce Plan for England, developed with NHS England, for the first time provides detailed data on key professions so that local Cancer Alliances, HEE and employers can agree the actions needed to help recruit, train and retain the staff necessary to deliver improvements in cancer care.

It looks at the work already happening and outlines plans for a skills expansion over the next three years to support growth and transformation. This includes:

- Investment in 200 additional clinical endoscopists to support to increase diagnostic capacity and free up the time of Consultants to spend more time on complex cases;
- Investment in 300 reporting radiographers by 2021 to support an increase the capacity for earlier diagnosis as part of a national programme to assure quality and consistency;
- Actions identified including retention initiatives to produce an additional 746 consultants working in cancer by 2021, (an estimated 21% increase on 2016);
- Expansion of Cancer Nurse Specialists to develop consistent competencies for this key role and a clear route into training. A more detailed report on the wider contribution of nursing to cancer in light of new census data will be published in spring 2018;
- Supporting the continued development of cancer staff skills through a national dedicated Skills Fund to support the development and roll out of national transformational projects; and;
- Work with partners to identify and tackle the root problems behind workforce gaps in a national Cancer Staff Forum to make working and remaining in the NHS more attractive.

Professor Ian Cumming, Chief Executive, Health Education England said:

It's good news that more patients are surviving cancer than ever before due to unprecedented advances in our ability to prevent, diagnose and treat cancer. Today's plan sets out a pragmatic approach to ensure we have sufficient staff with the right skills to embed new tests and treatments, as well as initiatives to retain staff who already deliver much needed care and support to cancer patients and their families up and down the country. Rightly so, it places workforce at the centre of transforming cancer care.

We do not underestimate the scale of the challenge ahead. To succeed in delivering the changes we have said are required will require concerted action and focus from partners working across the health and care system, including Royal Colleges and regulators.

Today's announcement represents a significant step towards making the improvements to cancer care we all know are needed, a reality. The measures are ambitious but essential for delivering
the world class cancer care services we all want to see. I'm confident the NHS can rise to this challenge.

The UK is facing increased demand for cancer treatments based on the growing number of cases of cancer diagnosed each year and the fact that people are living for longer with cancer. Around 357,000 people in the UK were diagnosed with cancer in 2014. In the year 2022, it has been projected that there will be around 422,000 new cases. Cancer care is one of the Five Year Forward View's key priorities.

The strategy has been developed in response to the independent Cancer Taskforce which set out a strategy to radically improve diagnosis, longer term quality of life and experiences for people who are affected by cancer in England.

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Cancer workforce plan

Cancer care is one of the Five Year Forward View's key priorities - focussing on prevention, earlier diagnosis, better treatment and living with cancer. Having access to more skilled staff in the right areas will be key to delivering on that strategy.

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