



The Royal College of Radiologists

Professor Sir Gregor Smith  
Chief Medical Officer  
Scottish Government  
St Andrew's House  
Regent Road  
Edinburgh  
EH1 3DG

23 November 2023

Dear Professor Sir Smith,

As a group of clinicians with a keen interest in ensuring the longevity of Scotland's cancer services, we are writing to request a meeting to discuss the current cancer workforce crisis.

You will be well aware that Scotland's significant NHS staff shortages are severely limiting our ability to deliver cancer treatments in a safe and effective manner. Demand for systemic anti-cancer therapy (SACT) is growing substantially. Since 2014, the number of SACT appointments in all units has risen by approximately 8% each year.<sup>i</sup> Workforce growth is simply not keeping pace. In 2022, the consultant workforce grew by just one clinical oncologist, two haematologists and three medical oncologists.<sup>ii,iii</sup> All centres report similar shortages in the wider non-medical workforce groups who contribute significantly to SACT services across Scotland.

Scotland's unique geography and health service structure make it much more vulnerable to workforce challenges than the rest of the UK. The small total consultant workforce means losing even one doctor earlier than expected can have a substantial impact on that department's ability to keep up with demand. Significant pockets of inequality also exist. In North Scotland, there are far fewer oncologists and haematologists per head of population than in the South East or South West of Scotland. These lower ratios impede the effective delivery of care, especially due to the complicated geography. For instance, Inverness, despite being the smallest cancer centre, covers a region the size of Belgium.

To meet the increased demand for SACT treatments, cancer teams are under pressure to compromise patient safety by explicitly rationing or delaying patients' treatment. Staff are exhausted and are no longer able to provide the best quality care to which they aspire.

We, a group of clinicians invested and experienced in Scottish SACT services, supported by the Royal College of Radiologists, have met to explore the scale of the challenge in the different subspecialties and regions. We have also developed a policy briefing which includes recommendations for how the Scottish Government and NHS Scotland can specifically support the SACT workforce. The briefing includes short- and long-term solutions, ranging from new training pathways to alternative models of care and we hope it is considered in parallel and complementary to the important work of other groups in this area.

Given the urgency of the situation, we would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you, present our proposals and discuss how we can support you with this work.



While this is not an easy path to take, it is now a necessary one. Without immediate action, we risk denying patients access to life saving treatment, putting an already burned-out workforce under greater pressure and failing to meet Scotland's national cancer ambitions.

We hope you hear from you soon on this important issue.

Yours sincerely,

**Dr Frances Yuille** – Consultant Clinical Oncologist, NHS Lothian and Chair, Royal College of Radiologists Scottish Standing Committee

**Professor David Cameron** – Consultant Medical Oncologist, NHS Lothian and Chair, Scottish National SACT programme board

**Dr Sophie Barrett** - Consultant Medical Oncologist, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and SACT Lead, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (until August 2023)

**Dr Peter Forsyth** - Consultant Haematologist, Raigmore Hospital, Inverness and SACT Lead, NHS Highland

**Dr Fiona Cutler** – Consultant Haematologist, NHS Ayrshire and Arran and Regional SACT Lead, WoSCAN

**Dr Tom Roques**, Vice President, Clinical Oncology, Royal College of Radiologists

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<sup>i</sup> Public Health Scotland. SACT treatment activity in Scotland – annual activity data. Available at: <https://scotland.shinyapps.io/phs-covid-wider-impact/>. [Accessed August 2023].

<sup>ii</sup> Royal College of Radiologists. Clinical Oncology Workforce Census 2022.

<sup>iii</sup> Royal College of Physicians. UK 2022 census of consultants. 2023. Available at: <https://www.rcp.ac.uk/guidelines-policy/census-data-toolkits>. [Accessed October 2023].

