

Introduction

The Peninsula Cancer Network Board, which includes representatives from the four PCTs and five acute trusts serving Devon Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, is leading work to ensure that gynaecological cancer services comply with national Improving Outcomes Guidance (IOG).

The IOG has already been fully implemented across 26 of the 30 cancer networks in England. It sets out the service model most likely to give good outcomes, adding: "If this is achieved successfully it is much more likely that women with these cancers will receive optimum investigation, assessment, and treatment."

The IOG adds: "In gynaecological cancer, treatment by specialist teams is likely to improve survival and quality of life. Specialisation at the level of the Cancer Centre allows women with rarer or more-challenging cancers to be treated by clinicians who see enough cases to develop the expertise necessary to manage the disease effectively."

"Team working facilitates co-ordinated care. Patients managed by teams are more likely to be offered appropriate treatments and to receive continuity of care through all stages of the disease. Specialist nurses in multi-professional teams can reduce patients' distress, increase satisfaction, and improve information flow to patients."

The IOG model is based on two levels of specialist hospital care:

1. The Specialist Gynaecological Cancer Centre, serving a population (men and women) of at least one million, with around 200 new referrals per year.
2. The Local Gynaecological Cancer Unit, serving populations of at least 200,000 (anticipated range 100,000 – 400,000), with about 50 new referrals per year.

This IOG states that the specialist multi-professional gynaecological oncology teams based in Cancer Centres should be responsible for the management of all women with ovarian cancer, and the majority of women with other gynaecological cancers. The only cancers that should be managed in Cancer Units are some cervical and uterine cancers.

The local position

There is currently one Specialist Gynaecological Cancer Centre for the whole peninsula – the Royal Devon and Exeter NHS Foundation Trust, which was designated in 2004. It serves women primarily from the NHS Devon and Torbay Care Trust areas.

Surgery is also carried out at two Local Gynaecological Cancer Units:

- Plymouth Hospitals NHS Trust
- Royal Cornwall Hospitals NHS Trust, Truro

However, the National Cancer Action Team has agreed the principle that a second specialist centre be created for women in the west of the peninsula, in the light of the numbers of patients and the geographical challenges.

In summer 2009, the PCN commissioned an independent clinical review by national specialists to help PCTs decide whether the second specialist centre should be at Plymouth or at Truro. Whichever was not chosen would remain as a cancer unit.

The reviewers were also asked to provide assurance that all complex gynaecological cancer cases, including ovarian, were appropriately referred into the existing centre at Exeter.

The clinical review

The first review visit, covering Truro and Plymouth, took place on 14-15 September 2009. A subsequent visit to Exeter was carried out on 23 October 2009.

The reviewers' report, published on 1 December 2009, concluded that:

- The Royal Devon and Exeter service was “exemplary”
- The second specialist centre should be created at Truro

The findings were based on a weighted scoring system, aligned with the terms of reference. The reviewers added additional criteria to be considered, such as research, information systems and leadership, against which they also measured each hospital.

The report scored the RD&E's service as 73 out of 75 under the terms of reference. Adding in the additional criteria, the RD&E scored 106 out of 108.

The report added: “The visitors were impressed by the professionalism and team working within the gynaecological cancer centre at Exeter. It is clearly a patient-focused service and very inclusive of its associated units. All those involved should be justly proud of the service that they deliver and we believe that this could be considered an exemplary gynaecological cancer centre.”

When looking at the best potential site for the second specialist centre, the reviewers scored:

- Truro at 67 out of 75 under the terms of reference, and 97 out of 108 with additional criteria
- Plymouth at 56 out of 75 under the terms of reference, and 81 out of 108 with additional criteria

The reviewers concluded: “We are of the opinion that following our visits to Truro and Plymouth requested by the Peninsula Network that Truro should be designated as a gynaecological cancer centre.”

The way forward

The clinical review report and proposals arising from it will now be shared and discussed with the five Overview and Scrutiny Committees (OSCs) that serve Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. These discussions will shape plans for engagement with patients, patient and support groups, and the wider public.

The outcomes will be shared with OSCs, before being brought back to PCT Boards for final decisions.

The Board is asked to **receive** the independent clinical review report.