Charity calls for immediate action to improve the cancer tipped to overtake breast cancer as the UK's 4th biggest cancer killer by 2030

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With pancreatic cancer predicted to overtake breast cancer as the UK's fourth biggest cause of cancer death by 2030, Pancreatic Cancer Action (PCA), a stakeholder for the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Pancreatic Cancer today welcomes the report into the recent Pancreatic Cancer Inquiry for which the charity provided comprehensive evidence.

The APPG is calling on the government to further the cause of pancreatic cancer, which kills 22 people per day in the UK, in Parliament. As part of this, they'd like to see professional bodies promoting and supporting educational tools currently available to clinicians including PCA's e-learning module written alongside the Royal College of GPs.

The APPG is also recommending that there should be a specific pancreatic cancer awareness campaign piloted as part of the National Awareness and Early Diagnosis Initiative.

"PCA's aim is to improve survival for pancreatic cancer patients through earlier diagnosis," says Ali Stunt, PCA's Chief Executive and rare survivor of pancreatic cancer.

"Part of this is producing public symptoms awareness material but the level of funding we attract from public donations will not allow us to raise awareness on the scale that the Departments of Health or NHS England can."

Ali also stressed that, "the Inquiry report is a good, well-balanced one with some excellent recommendations. We hope these are listened to and acted upon by policy makers and funders within the Department of Health and NHS England and not, as can so easily happen with such reports, be left on a shelf to gather dust.

"With the number of people diagnosed with this deadly disease increasing all time, it is vital that immediate action is taken.

"One such action should be giving GPs direct access to CT scans which, many of the GPs that gave evidence to the Inquiry, believed would be a 'positive step forward'," says Ali. "This is something that can be done now without a major overhaul of the NHS. The barriers to doing so, such as cost, are no longer relevant in 2013.

Ali Stunt continues: "We believe education is a crucial element to help improve early diagnosis of pancreatic cancer and we have been working hard to develop top quality materials for different clinical audiences.

"What we need now is better take-up of these free, CPD accredited tools including our GP elearning module. These tools have been well received by those who have used them but nihilistic attitudes surrounding pancreatic cancer among some clinicians have sadly been a barrier to their use."

PCA is currently writing a similar e-learning module for secondary care (hospital doctors) alongside the British Medical Journal and are producing podcasts for medical undergraduates.

"We have tried calling for this directly with NAEDI but the response has been that not enough people suffer from pancreatic cancer to make it viable," explains Ali. "We believe that pancreatic cancer should be looked at in terms of its disease burden: the 5th biggest cancer killer in the UK currently but predicted to overtake breast cancer as the 4th biggest by 2030. We would be more than willing to work with other agencies who can fund this important campaign."

Pancreatic Cancer Action, in oral evidence, also called for an audit of pancreatic cancer treatments as a priority and we welcome its inclusion in the Inquiry recommendations. We would like to see this escalated to the top of the list for the Healthcare Quality Improvement Partnership (HQIP) to expedite.

"We are encouraged to hear the Inquiry listened to our evidence. Currently to understand the pancreatic cancer landscape in terms of diagnosis, referrals and treatments is like trying to navigate without a compass. We urgently need to know who's doing what, when, where and why and to find out where the

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best practice is for it to be emulated across the country” said Ali Stunt.

“Pancreatic cancer has been the Cinderella of all cancers in terms of attention and funding for decades,” claims Ali. “It is now time to put the spotlight on the disease and to start to get backing from the NHS and Department of Health to really try to improve early diagnosis, survival and the patient experience. There are some excellent recommendations in the APPG Inquiry on Pancreatic Cancer report, which we hope will be acted upon.”

Company Contact:

Pancreatic Cancer Action

T. 0303 040 1770
E. comms@panact.org
W. https://www.pancreaticcanceraction.org/

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