

Jeane Freeman MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport
The Scottish Government
St. Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

Friday 23 November 2018

Dear Ms Freeman

Breast cancer patients represent the largest cancer patient group in the UK, with approximately 691,000 people, predicted to rise to 840,000 in 2020. In Scotland, there are 58,000 people currently living with breast cancer.

There are an estimated 4,090 people living with secondary breast cancer in Scotland, according to the Scottish Cancer Registry. Across the UK, there are an estimated 35,000 people living with the disease. Secondary breast cancer is treatable but not curable, and it is estimated that up to a third of primary breast cancer patients will go on to develop secondary breast cancer. Over 11,500 people lose their lives to breast cancer every year and recent analysis suggest that this figure could rise within the next four years.

The lack of robust data for secondary breast cancer remains a barrier to understanding the scale of the challenge and ensuring the necessary services are in place to meet the needs of those living with the disease.

We are writing to express our concerns regarding the fact that, despite this, there is no specific commitment to provide a comprehensive package of support tailored for people living with incurable cancers in Scotland's Cancer Plan, 'Beating Cancer: Ambition and Action'. This is despite the fact that we know people living with a diagnosis of secondary breast cancer often have complex emotional and physical needs.

Our research shows that, currently, many people are not receiving the support they need to manage the complex physical and emotional impacts of the disease. For example, our recent campaign, 'Secondary. Not Second Rate: Incurable shouldn't mean unsupported', showed that in Scotland:

- Three quarters (73%) of Health Boards do not offer secondary breast cancer patients access to a dedicated nurse specialist with specific skills and expertise in secondary breast cancer
- Over two fifths (42%) of Health Boards are not assessing people's emotional and physical needs when they are diagnosed and as their treatment changes
- Over two fifths (42%) of Health Boards are not able to tell us how many people with secondary breast cancer they are currently supporting
- Almost half (45%) of Health Boards do not offer people access to a tailored health and wellbeing event

We believe that incurable shouldn't mean unsupported and people living with secondary breast cancer must be able to access the support they need to live well. The Scottish Cancer

For breast cancer care, support and information, call us free on 0808 800 6000 or visit breastcancercare.org.uk

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Patient Experience Survey highlights the important role that a clinical nurse specialist plays in providing specialist information and support. The survey also highlighted inconsistencies in the provision of information patients receive about treatments, support groups and about the impact of cancer. Our research shows that not everyone has access to a dedicated clinical nurse specialist or is referred to a tailored health and wellbeing event where they would be provided with vital information and support.

That's why we urgently need the Scottish Government to commit to create a Secondary Support Package that people with secondary breast cancer can access when diagnosed, through treatment and during end-of-life care.

The Support Package would include a full assessment of emotional and physical needs, access to a specialist nurse, treatment summaries, and a tailored health and wellbeing event. This would guarantee women receive vital specialised and ongoing support.

We urge you to take action today by committing to ensure people living with secondary breast cancer have the support they need to live well.

We have set out the measures of support required for people with secondary breast cancer with this letter, along with a list of cross-party MSPs and MPs that support our campaign.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Angela Harris', written in a cursive style.

Angela Harris

Head of Scotland, Breast Cancer Care