

Minister for Prevention, Public Health and Primary Care
Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London, United Kingdom
SW1H 0EU

Wednesday, 3 March 2021

Dear Ms Churchill,

RE: Secondary Breast Cancer

Today marks one year since we, along with incredible women from our secondary breast cancer campaign group, met with you to present our petition with over 70,000 signatures demanding change for people with secondary breast cancer. Thank you, again, for meeting with Breast Cancer Now and listening to the experiences of these women.

We are grateful that we have always been able to rely on your kindness, support, and commitment to improve the lives of people with secondary breast cancer. However, a year on from our meeting, very little has changed, and we have yet to receive an official response to the recommendations from our 'Unsurvivors' report in 2019.

We know the NHS is facing huge pressure and are thankful for the NHS staff who have supported the continuation of cancer services. However, improving treatment and support for people living with secondary breast cancer must remain a priority.

Indeed, the pandemic has made these issues more apparent. In 2019, our report showed that many people with secondary breast cancer were experiencing delays in diagnosis, struggling to access the support of a specialist nurse and fearful they would not be able to access the treatments they need in the future. This continues to be the case.

During the pandemic, we saw huge levels of anxiety, particularly amongst people with secondary breast cancer and their loved ones, over delays and cancellations to treatments alongside changes to the support they receive. Clinical trials, which provide a vital opportunity for secondary breast cancer patients to access potential new treatments at an early stage of their development, have been disrupted. Guidance also suggested how patients should be prioritised for drug treatment if this became necessary, with patients having noncurative treatment, such as those with secondary breast cancer, generally given a lower priority than those having curative treatment. We still do not know to what extent this guidance was used in practice.

This is all underpinned by the fact that, at present, there is no published data on the number of secondary breast cancer diagnoses each year. Where data on secondary breast cancer is collected, there is variation in what is recorded. This is despite it being mandatory for Hospital Trusts in England to collect data on new diagnoses of metastatic breast cancer since 2013.

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Breast Cancer Now is a working name of Breast Cancer Care and Breast Cancer Now, a company limited by guarantee registered in England (8347609) and a charity registered in England and Wales (1160558), Scotland (SC045684) and a business name of the registered charity in the Isle of Man (1200). Registered Office: Fifth Floor, Ibex House, 42-47 Minories, London EC3N 1DY



Without an accurate figure for the number of people living with secondary breast cancer and a better understanding of their experiences, it is extremely difficult for the NHS to plan and commission services effectively to meet the needs of patients, especially as we recover from the pandemic.

This situation has led to people living with the disease to tell us they feel forgotten about and ignored. It is time we break the pattern. We must show, once and for all, that patients with secondary breast cancer matter. That their lives are not insignificant. That they will receive the treatment, support, and care they deserve.

We were delighted with your offer to work with the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Breast Cancer on a national secondary breast cancer audit. We stand ready to work with you and your Department to deliver vital improvements.

We ask that you support the implementation of a national secondary breast cancer audit with urgency, as a first step to improve what we know about secondary breast cancer and would welcome more details about any progress that has been made.

In addition, we would like to understand your Department's priorities for secondary breast cancer over the next year, specifically any actions that we could work together to deliver.

We urge you to send a message to people who are living with incurable breast cancer that they are a priority for your Department and that the Government will ensure they receive the care and support they need and will do their best to ensure that they can live as well as they can for as long as they can.

We look forward to hearing from you soon,



**Delyth Morgan
Chief Executive**

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