The Royal College of Pathologists
Pathology: the science behind the cure

The Royal College of Pathologists' comments on the National endoscopy programme action plan 2019-2023

29 November 2022

Background

The Royal College of Pathologists' Welsh Council welcomes the chance to respond to this consultation on the national endoscopy plan.

Endoscopy services are essential for investigating suspected bowel cancer. The adoption of the faecal immunochemical test (FIT) test is anticipated to improve screening uptake, which in turn will help more patients receive an early cancer diagnosis. The endoscopy workload is anticipated to rise as a result of this change. The provision of endoscopy services is a halfway point in the patient's diagnostic journey. When endoscopy is done, suspicious areas are biopsied and sent to the pathology laboratory, where the sample is processed and histopathologists diagnose cancer.

Workforce concerns

An increase in endoscopies results in proportionately more biopsies being taken, which increases the workload in the histopathology department. Like other services, Histopathology services in Wales are also overburdened due to workload and staffing issues. If these are not addressed, it will lead to a backlog of pathology reports that will delay the diagnosis of cancer. Some laboratories already have a 4–8 week backlog for reporting.

The National Endoscopy Program Action Plan outlines a phased improvement plan to assist Health boards in creating endoscopy services that are sustainable. There are recommendations for Health boards to assess resource availability and demand capacity for endoscopy services.

RCPath suggestions

The RCPath Welsh Council suggests the following additions to the list of suggestions made by the National Endoscopy Program Action Plan 2019-2023:

-For Health boards to ensure that the pathology laboratories are equipped with the latest and advanced resources including a sustainable national Laboratory Information Management System, modern laboratory equipment including regular macrophotographs of the specimens, entire barcoded laboratory processes, improved processors, staining equipment with digital scanner resulting in integrated digital cellular pathology services supported by modern computational pathology tools (AI).

- For Health boards to support training and skill mixing various human resource in the above process including scientists and pathologists to facilitate prompt and accurate reporting of these niche specimens to facilitate best patient outcome for our patients.

- The health boards also needed to invest in Research & Development to develop in house laboratory tools including development of new bio/oncological markers and tools for artificial intelligence for both diagnostic and prognostic purposes.

Contact details

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About the Royal College of Pathologists

The Royal College of Pathologists is a professional membership organisation with more than 11,000 fellows, affiliates and trainees, of which 23% are based outside of the UK. We are committed to setting and maintaining professional standards and promoting excellence in the teaching and practice of pathology, for the benefit of patients.

Our members include medically and veterinary qualified pathologists and clinical scientists in 17 different specialties, including cellular pathology, haematology, clinical biochemistry, medical microbiology and veterinary pathology.

The College works with pathologists at every stage of their career. We set curricula, organise training and run exams, publish clinical guidelines and best practice recommendations and provide continuing professional development. We engage a wide range of stakeholders to improve awareness and understanding of pathology and the vital role it plays in everybody's healthcare. Working with members, we run programmes to inspire the next generation to study science and join the profession.