



Mr Robin Swann MLA
Minister of Health
Northern Ireland Assembly
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont
Belfast
BT4 3XX

10 February 2020

Dear Minister

I am writing to congratulate you on your recent appointment as Minister of Health and to introduce you to the Blood Cancer Alliance (BCA) and to request a briefing meeting to inform you about our work.

To inform you, the BCA is a group of fourteen charities representing people with blood cancer across the United Kingdom. It was formed to provide a strong, unified voice to tackle the issues blood cancer patients and their families face, and to improve the experience and outcomes of all those living with one of the 100+ types of the disease.

Blood cancer is the fifth most common type of adult cancer, the most common cancer amongst children and the third biggest cancer killer, and claims more lives every year than breast or prostate cancer. However this type of cancer is often poorly understood relative to the 'big four'. Unlike solid tumour cancers, blood cancers are often not treatable using surgery or radiotherapy. According to the latest Cancer Treatment facts and figures only 11% and 12% of blood cancer patients respectively were treated through radiotherapy and surgery compared to 55% of breast cancer patients treated through radiotherapy and 77% through surgery.

As you may be aware following the publication of recent research by the Centre for Public Health at the Queen's University Belfast, in Northern Ireland there were 782 patients diagnosed annually with blood and lymph cancer between 2013 and 2017. Diagnosing some types of blood cancer is often complex as symptoms, such as back pain or tiredness, are often misunderstood or misdiagnosed. This lack of awareness and understanding often has a direct impact on patients and is a significant challenge to overcome as later diagnosis is generally linked with poorer survival outcomes. This is showcased in the latest figures which highlight the three year net survival rate was at its lowest when patients were diagnosed via the Emergency Presentation Route-to-Diagnosis rather than when the cancer is diagnosed at an earlier stage.

The BCA welcomes the latest developments on the new Cancer Strategy for Northern Ireland and is keen to investigate how we can work together to ensure the strategy supports blood cancer patients. Specifically, within the strategy the BCA is calling for the diagnosis gap to be closed.

We would be delighted to discuss these issues with you and how we can work together to secure progress in more depth in Belfast. If this is of interest, please do get in touch with the secretariat to the Alliance on bloodcanceralliance@atlas-partners.co.uk.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. Scowcroft", written in a cursive style.

Stephen Scowcroft
Chair
Blood Cancer Alliance



From and on behalf of the Blood Cancer Alliance:

Handwritten signature of Marc Auckland in blue ink.

Marc Auckland
Chair, CLL Support Association

Handwritten signature of Joanne Badger in black ink.

Joanne Badger
Co-ordinator, Leukaemia and Lymphoma NI

Handwritten signature of Henry Braund in black ink.

Henry Braund
Chief Executive, Anthony Nolan

Handwritten signature of Lindsey Bennister in black ink.

Lindsey Bennister
Chief Executive, WMUK

Handwritten signature of Sandy Craine in black ink.

Sandy Craine
Director, CML Support Group

Handwritten signature of Rupinder Gill in black ink.

Rupinder Gill
Chief Executive, Lymphoma Action

Handwritten signature of Sarah McDonald in black ink.

Sarah McDonald
Director of Research, Myeloma UK

Handwritten signature of Orin Lewis in black ink.

Orin Lewis
Co-Founder and Chief Executive, ACLT

Handwritten signature of Zack Pemberton-Whiteley in black ink.

Zack Pemberton-Whiteley
Patient Advocacy Director
Leukaemia Care

Handwritten signature of Gemma Peters in black ink.

Gemma Peters
Chief Executive, Bloodwise

Handwritten signature of Angela Smith-Morgan in black ink.

Angela Smith-Morgan
Chief Executive, Leukaemia UK

Handwritten signature of Sophie Wintrich in black ink.

Sophie Wintrich
Chief Executive, MDS UK Support
Group

Handwritten signature of Julie Child in black ink.

Julie Child
General Manager
Race Against Blood Cancer

Handwritten signature of Jonathan Peters in black ink.

Jonathan Peters
Chief Executive Officer
DKMS