

# Supporting earlier recognition of blood cancer in primary care

## A need to make blood cancer more visible

Blood cancer (such as leukaemia, myeloma and lymphoma) is the **third most common** cause of cancer death in the UK, killing more people than breast or prostate cancer.<sup>1</sup>

Over **250,000** people are living with blood cancer in the UK, and there are **40,000** new cases each year.<sup>2</sup>

It is the **fifth** most common cancer overall in the UK.<sup>2</sup>

## The importance of earlier diagnosis

The World Health Organization states early diagnosis 'improves cancer outcomes by providing the greatest likelihood of successful treatment, at lower cost and with less complex interventions'.<sup>3</sup>

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Blood Cancer states 'delays in blood cancer diagnosis can have a major impact on the patient's quality of life and overall outcome'.<sup>1</sup>

The NHS Long Term Plan pledges to increase the proportion of cancers diagnosed early to 75% by 2028.<sup>4</sup>

**"Primary care awareness of blood cancers matters to patients and to ourselves – we have probably all missed opportunities to diagnose earlier. By providing primary care teams with useful educational resources, we can play a key part in improving services and supporting positive patient outcomes."**

Dr Pawan Randev, FRCGP, GP Trainer, Primary Care Lead East Midlands Cancer Alliance

## A snapshot of symptoms

Diagnosing blood cancer, particularly in the early stages, can be a challenge because the signs and symptoms are common to other unrelated illnesses. Symptom clusters and persistence should raise suspicion of a potentially serious underlying disease.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) advises considering a very urgent (within 48 hours) full blood count to assess for leukaemia in adults with any of the following symptoms:<sup>5</sup>

- Pallor
- Persistent fatigue
- Unexplained fever
- Unexplained persistent or recurrent infection
- Generalised lymphadenopathy
- Unexplained bruising
- Unexplained bleeding
- Unexplained petechiae
- Hepatosplenomegaly

Myeloma, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma or Hodgkin's lymphoma might be suspected in adults with:<sup>5</sup>

- Persistent bone pain, particularly back pain, or unexplained fracture (myeloma – people aged 60 years and over)
- Unexplained lymphadenopathy (Hodgkin's lymphoma) or unexplained lymphadenopathy or splenomegaly (non-Hodgkin's lymphoma)

Particularly in association with:<sup>5</sup>

- Fever
- Night sweats
- Shortness of breath
- Pruritus
- Weight loss
- Alcohol-induced lymph node pain (Hodgkin's lymphoma only)

This is not an exhaustive list and symptoms can often present in various ways. Always consult your GP if you have any concerns.

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## Online learning resources to support GP's understanding of blood cancer:

- Cancer: [www.gatewayc.org.uk](http://www.gatewayc.org.uk)
- Blood cancer: [www.elearning.rcgp.org.uk/course/info.php?id=184](http://www.elearning.rcgp.org.uk/course/info.php?id=184)
- Leukaemia: [www.leukaemiacare.org.uk/support-and-information/for-healthcare-professionals/gp-learning/](http://www.leukaemiacare.org.uk/support-and-information/for-healthcare-professionals/gp-learning/)  
[www.leukaemiaelearning.org.uk/](http://www.leukaemiaelearning.org.uk/)
- Lymphoma: [www.elearning.rcgp.org.uk/course/info.php?id=172](http://www.elearning.rcgp.org.uk/course/info.php?id=172)
- Myeloma: [www.elearning.rcgp.org.uk/course/info.php?id=281](http://www.elearning.rcgp.org.uk/course/info.php?id=281)



## Further Information

### NICE suspected cancer recognition and referral overview

[www.pathways.nice.org.uk/pathways/suspected-cancer-recognition-and-referral](http://www.pathways.nice.org.uk/pathways/suspected-cancer-recognition-and-referral)

- Helps GPs diagnose cancer via presenting symptoms, site, or type of cancer.
- Provides recommendations on next steps such as referral or investigations for each symptom.

### QCancer

[www.qcancer.org](http://www.qcancer.org)

- Risk calculator based on symptoms a patient presents with, taking into account age, sex, and social factors.
- Calculates risk of blood cancer overall rather than the different types of blood cancer.

### Blood cancer symptoms guide

[https://bloodwise.org.uk/order-our-blood-cancer-symptoms-guide?utm\\_source=civi&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=bcam&utm\\_content=janssen](https://bloodwise.org.uk/order-our-blood-cancer-symptoms-guide?utm_source=civi&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=bcam&utm_content=janssen)

- Produced by Bloodwise to help your patients spot the signs and symptoms of blood cancer.

This information has been developed as part of the Make Blood Cancer Visible 2019 campaign which aims to improve earlier diagnosis by making people aware of the symptoms of blood cancer. The campaign is sponsored by Janssen and supported by nine blood cancer patient support groups.

To find out more visit [www.makebloodcancervisible.co.uk](http://www.makebloodcancervisible.co.uk).

#### References

1. APPG on Blood Cancer. The Hidden Cancer. Available at: [https://bloodwise.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/appg\\_report\\_on\\_blood\\_cancer.pdf](https://bloodwise.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/appg_report_on_blood_cancer.pdf). Last accessed August 2019
2. Bloodwise. Blood cancer. <https://bloodwise.org.uk/info-support/blood-cancer>. Last accessed August 2019.
3. World Health Organization (WHO). Guide to Cancer. Early diagnosis. Geneva: WHO, 2017.
4. NHS Long Term Plan. [www.longtermplan.nhs.uk](http://www.longtermplan.nhs.uk). Last accessed August 2019.
5. National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). Suspected cancer: recognition and referral. NICE guideline (NG12). London: NICE, 2015.