



The Royal College of Radiologists

***From the Office of the President  
Dr Katharine Halliday MB ChB FRCS FRCR***

Rt Hon Andrew Stephenson MP  
Minister of State  
Department of Health and Social Care  
39 Victoria Street  
SW1H 0EU  
**2<sup>nd</sup> May 2024**

Dear Minister,

We are writing to you today as President and Vice-President of The Royal College of Radiologists (RCR) with our concerns about the decline in operational performance in radiotherapy, which we have seen over the last three years.

The Radiotherapy Board, of which the RCR is a member, will today publish a policy briefing highlighting the troubling delays being experienced by radiotherapy patients. It shows that in 2023, 11% of patients in England started their treatment more than 31 days after a decision to treat by their clinical team, compared to just 5% in 2021.

**I'm sure you will agree that any delay in vital cancer treatment is of great concern. Yet, the 31-day target has not been met since July 2021.**

There are a number of reasons for the significant delays which cancer patients are currently experiencing. Notably, there are serious shortages in the cancer workforce. The latest RCR census of the clinical oncology workforce shows a 15% shortfall of the doctors who oversee radiotherapy treatment.

The briefing also highlights a lack of clinical capacity to embed innovations such as new radiotherapy techniques and AI, our serious concerns around radiotherapy equipment replacement, and limitations in the Radiotherapy Dataset which fails to measure the hidden waiting times in patient pathways.

**We are calling for adequate investment in the workforce and in radiotherapy to ensure that the 31-day target is achieved, and that patients are treated in a safe and timely manner.**

This can be achieved through a focus on recruitment, retention and training to boost capacity in the cancer workforce. We need to invest in the Radiotherapy Dataset so we can better understand pinch points and set out plans for a radiotherapy funding model which is fit for purpose.

This week, the Board will also publish findings from the Health Economics in Radiation Oncology (HERO) project. It is the first study to estimate the costs and resource requirements of radiotherapy in England. With 29% of the total cost of radiotherapy being attributed to workforce costs, it shows that a relatively small investment in workforce could have a big impact on patient care.

**Furthermore, in June, the RCR will publish the latest workforce census for the clinical radiology and clinical oncology professions.** Following the high-profile media attention which we were able to garner last year, we will again be making the case that a fully staffed workforce is essential if we are to hit national targets for cancer waiting times.



**We would be grateful to meet with you in advance of the census release to brief you on our findings in person as well as discuss in more detail the radiotherapy and groundbreaking HERO briefings.** If you are willing, your office can contact us at [president@rcr.ac.uk](mailto:president@rcr.ac.uk) so that we can find a suitable time.

Yours sincerely



**Dr Katharine Halliday**

President

[president@rcr.ac.uk](mailto:president@rcr.ac.uk)



**Dr Tom Roques**

Vice-President, Clinical Oncology

