

People with cancer put at risk as workforce shortages in clinical oncology escalate

The RCR clinical oncology UK workforce census 2019

There are **93** consultant clinical oncologist **vacancies**. Supply from UK **specialist training** will **only fill half** of them.



Around **1,000** **new cancer cases** are diagnosed **each day** in the UK



Nearly **half** of **consultant clinical oncologist vacancies**

46%

have been **unfilled for a year** or more

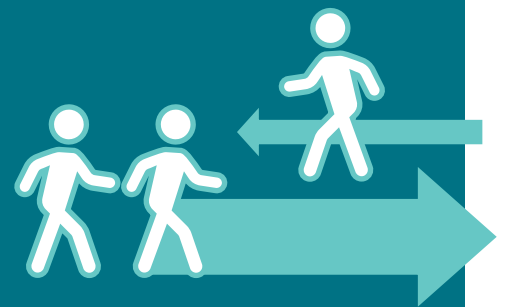


The NHS is **understaffed by 207 WTE** consultant clinical oncologists – a shortfall of

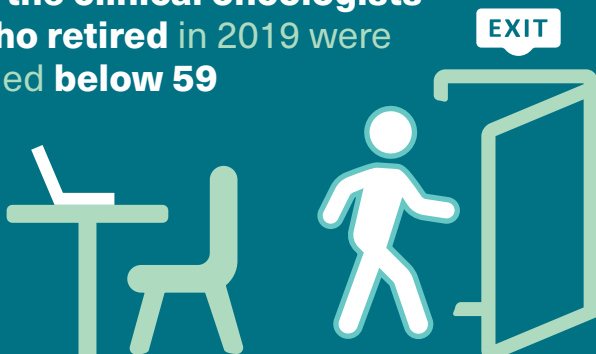
19%

forecast to rise to 26% by 2024

The **shortage of breast cancer experts** is forecast to **worsen**, with one consultant clinical oncologist set to join the workforce for every two that leave



With increased workforce pressures and pension tax concerns, **half of the clinical oncologists who retired** in 2019 were aged **below 59**



Vacant consultant clinical oncologist posts have more than **doubled** over the past five years; the vacancy rate is now

10%



NHS cancer workforce capacity is not keeping up with the demand for cancer care.

Every day 1,000 people in the UK are diagnosed with cancer.¹ As cancer incidence keeps rising so does demand for non-surgical cancer treatments. The latest RCR workforce census reveals that the number of clinical oncologists – cancer doctors who oversee non-surgical treatments such as radiotherapy, chemotherapy and immunotherapy – is at a standstill.

From 2018 to 2019, the clinical oncology workforce gained the equivalent of just five extra full-time staff across the whole of the UK.

The workforce is now desperately understaffed. It needs to increase by 19 per cent just to cover existing gaps in provision, let alone bring in improvements and innovation.

Staff shortages in clinical oncology are becoming entrenched. The consultant vacancy rate has doubled in the past five years and half of vacant posts stay empty for at least a year.

Training places are being filled with budding clinical oncologists, but the numbers are simply not enough. Newly qualified UK consultants will only fill half of vacancies, meanwhile, exhausted oncologists are retiring earlier and NHS cancer centres are struggling to recruit from abroad.

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We are unable to meet acceptable working standards with current staffing levels.

Alongside a stark overview, the RCR census also highlights specialist cancer services at risk. An expert shortage is looming in breast cancer care, with twice the number of breast oncologists leaving as join the workforce.

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There seems to be a trend of permanent consultants leaving the NHS.

If nothing is done to boost numbers, the current shortfall of clinical oncologists will hit at least 26 per cent – a shortage of 318 consultants – by 2024.

The RCR census submissions were returned before the advent of COVID-19 in the UK. The pandemic has meant delays and treatment alterations for thousands of patients and had a major impact on new cancer referrals. It will continue to significantly change how healthcare can be delivered for many years to come.

Cancer treatment has been continuing in spite of COVID-19. Many changes have been positive, such as improvements in information technology (IT), more virtual patient care and the implementation of novel treatment regimes.

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We have been unsuccessful for over two years in trying to fill these vacancies.

However, policy makers must now answer urgent questions about how the UK's chronically underfunded clinical oncology workforce can be expected to keep up with growing patient demand, navigate the impact of COVID-19 and go on to improve cancer care.

Patients deserve better. If the UK is serious about improving its cancer survival statistics and delivering world-class cancer care, then it must urgently invest in increasing, supporting and retaining its oncology staff.

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We are awaiting additional funding to extend radiotherapy hours ... and open on Saturdays.

The full clinical oncology UK workforce census 2019 report can be found on the RCR website: www.rcr.ac.uk/oncology/census

Quotes are from heads of UK cancer centres.