

**PCRS briefing paper**

**Screening for lung cancer**

Background

The conditions for which national screening programmes are available in the UK are selected after evaluation by the National Screening Committee, which advises the Government on which conditions justify having a programme. The Committee uses strict criteria in order to determine whether morbidity and mortality in the UK would benefit from a screening programme, and reviews the evidence based on these criteria. From time to time, the National Screening Committee reviews the conditions for which national screening programmes exist, and explores the merits of adding additional conditions to their list. Lung cancer and COPD have both been on the ‘potential’ list in the past.

In 2018/19, the case for a national screening programme for COPD was reviewed, and the decision taken that such a programme would not be appropriate for the following reasons:

* current tests are not reliable in people who have no symptoms of COPD and many people would be wrongly told they could have COPD
* quitting smoking is the best intervention, but it is not clear if people with few or no symptoms of COPD would quit if they were told they have it
* there is not enough evidence to understand if medicines are effective for people with mild COPD which would be detected by screening

In contrast, a lung cancer screening programme has been piloted in several areas already, and in February 2019, it was announced that this would be extended to a further 10 areas.[[1]](#endnote-1) The roll out has the potential to reach around 600,000 people over four years, detecting approximately 3,400 cancers and saving hundreds of lives across the country.[[2]](#endnote-2) The target areas have been selected as being among those with the highest death rates from lung cancer.

PCRS response/position:

1. PCRS gives a cautious welcome to this initiative. It is good that the pilots are being extended from the perspective of implementation research to generate more evidence, and before it is confirmed as a national programme. It is clear that the National Screening Committee’s stance is that more evidence is needed.
2. However, there appears to have been minimal primary care input into the protocol while it was in development in 2018. We have reviewed the project protocol in the context of our work with the diagnostic workstream of the Lung health taskforce, and will be actively seeking to clarify the detail of the investigations undertaken, the pathway for people who are found to have non-cancer respiratory symptoms which need investigating, and the implications for ensuring primary care systems can mount an effective response. The press release talks about CT scanning as the main intervention but also that people will get an ‘MOT/lung health check for their lungs’. And that cases of potential COPD may also be identified. This implies that spirometry will also be undertaken. It will be vital to ensure that the right pathway is in place to support patients who may have a non-cancer respiratory illness.
3. PCRS would need to see a full analysis of the pilots before deciding whether to support a comprehensive roll-out of a national screening programme.
4. PCRS recognises that COPD does not fulfil the current criteria for a national screening programme. However, we believe that there is growing evidence for a case finding programme targeted on people who are symptomatic and at risk of developing COPD, and that the situation for COPD should be reviewed on a regular basis so that emerging evidence can be considered. However, case finding is not in the remit of the National Screening Committee, so PCRS will continue to raise this issue as appropriate with relevant organisations.

References, links and quotes:

<https://blogs.bmj.com/bmjebmspotlight/2019/02/15/understanding-lung-cancer-screening/>

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/2019/02/lung-trucks/>

Reviewed by PCRS policy forum 12.8.19

Approved by PCRS Executive policy lead on committee 5.9.19

1. NHS England press release 8 Feb 2019 <https://www.england.nhs.uk/2019/02/lung-trucks/>

   North East and Cumbria Cancer Alliance – Newcastle Gateshead CCG

   Greater Manchester Cancer Alliance – Tameside and Glossop CCG

   Cheshire and Merseyside Cancer Alliance – Knowsley CCG and Halton CCG

   Lancashire and South Cumbria Cancer Alliance – Blackburn with Darwen CCG and Blackpool CCG

   West Yorkshire Cancer Alliance – North Kirklees CCG

   South Yorkshire Cancer Alliance – Doncaster CCG

   Humber, Coast and Vale Cancer Alliance – Hull CCG

   East of England Cancer Alliance – Thurrock CCG and Luton CCG

   East Midlands Cancer Alliance – Corby CCG and Mansfield and Ashfield CCG

   Wessex Cancer Alliance – Southampton CCG

   (earlier pilots were in Manchester and Liverpool) [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. NHS England press release 8 Feb 2019 NHS to roll out lung cancer scanning trucks across the country <https://www.england.nhs.uk/2019/02/lung-trucks/> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)