

Written evidence submitted by the Association of Cancer Physicians (ECS0012)

The Association of Cancer Physicians (ACP) is the professional society for medical oncologists in the UK. Demand for systemic therapy has been increasing year on year, and this growth is expected to continue. The current oncology workforce is struggling to cope with current demands and a rapid expansion is needed to keep pace with future demands.

Increased demand is being driven by several factors: an increased incidence of cancer; a growing and aging population, with more elderly patients presenting with complex needs and comorbidities; investment in cancer screening and early diagnosis is obviously welcomed but again creates extra pressures for oncology services; advances in genomics and personalised medicine combined with increased patient expectations on treatment options; drug development and improvements in supportive therapies; increased focus on survivorship is reflected in more patients remaining under the care of oncologists after their successful anti-cancer treatment has finished.

Even before COVID, the gap between demand for systemic therapy, particularly with the rapid advances in new therapeutic agents, and the medical oncology workforce needed to deliver, lead and develop services was widening. With more LTFT working and already over-stretched staff taking earlier retirement or leaving the specialty, this expansion is unsustainable without an investment in the workforce. The specialty welcomed the new specialty training numbers in medical oncology allocated in 2021, however this expansion needs to be continued in future years to develop a workforce to deliver world leading cancer services in the future.

The ACP is about to embark on a comprehensive workforce census to capture the medical oncology/chemotherapy prescribing workforce, with the granularity that should be very helpful in future workforce planning. The ACP fully supports the recent proposed amendment to the Health and Care Bill to strengthen workforce planning.

February 2022