

**MAKE  
BLOOD  
CANCER  
VISIBLE**

# 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>

## 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

This is not an exhaustive list and symptoms can often present in various ways.

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)

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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**

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

[media.bloodcancer.org.uk/documents/Blood\\_cancer\\_symptoms\\_guide\\_Blood\\_Cancer\\_UK.pdf](http://media.bloodcancer.org.uk/documents/Blood_cancer_symptoms_guide_Blood_Cancer_UK.pdf)

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

This information has been developed by Janssen UK as part of the **Make Blood Cancer Visible 2020** campaign which aims to improve earlier diagnosis by making people aware of the symptoms of blood cancer. The campaign is sponsored by Janssen UK 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://media.bloodcancer.org.uk/documents/bloodwise-appg-report-hidden-cancer.pdf>. Last accessed August 2020
2. Blood Cancer UK, 2019. Facts and information about blood cancer. Available at: <https://bloodcancer.org.uk/news/blood-cancer-facts/>. Last accessed: August 2020.
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 2020.
5. National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). Suspected cancer: recognition and referral. NICE guideline (NG12). London: NICE, 2015.