SWAG Cancer Alliance Newsletter

NHS Somerset, Wiltshire Avon and Gloucestershire Cancer Alliance

Leading and empowering excellence in cancer care for everyone across Somerset, Wiltshire, Avon and Gloucestershire.

Issued Monday 2 November 2026

A message from our Managing Director

Welcome to our November newsletter. October has been another busy and productive month across SWAG Cancer Alliance. We were pleased to share learning and innovation through our latest SWAG Innovates Together forum, where colleagues from Caafi Health showcased how community-led approaches are helping people access and use the NHS App through trusted local relationships and personalised support.

October also provided opportunities to engage with national partners and shape future cancer services. Helen Winter and I joined colleagues from Cancer Research UK at Hope for Tomorrow's Annual Partnership Day, highlighting the value of delivering treatment closer to home for patients. We also attended The King's Fund Cancer Conference, Fixing Today, Building Tomorrow, which brought together leaders from across the country to discuss the immediate challenges facing cancer services and the changes needed to deliver the ambitions of the National Cancer Plan.

Closer to home, our Board met to review progress during the first half of the year, reflecting on the impact of our work in responding to rising cancer referrals across the region. Members approved SWAG's Digital Plan, endorsed plans to establish a formal partnership with West of England Diagnostics Network and reviewed insights from our Neighbourhood Cancer Care co-design programme.

This month's newsletter highlights some fantastic examples of the impact being made across our region, from Bristol's designation as a Tessa Jowell Centre of Excellence to national recognition for our Domestic Abuse work, innovative support porgrammes for children and young people affected by cancer, and new initiatives supporting workforce development, innovation and service transformation.

Looking ahead to November, we have a busy programme of clinical and leadership events, including our Clinical Leadership Forum, several Clinical Advisory Groups, the Cancer Research UK leadership event, and the National Cancer Alliance Leadership Forum, where SWAG will be leading sessions on neighbourhood cancer care, robotic process automation in MDTs and innovation in the prostate pathway.

Thank you as always for your continued commitment, collaboration and support as we work together to improve cancer outcomes and experiences for people across Somerset, Wiltshire, Avon and Gloucestershire.

Best wishes,

Ruth Carr
Managing Director

Celebrating Successes

Bristol named as a Tessa Jowell Centre of Excellence

Bristol and the Somerset, Wiltshire, Avon and Gloucestershire Neuro-Oncology Network has been designated a Tessa Jowell Centre of Excellence for Adults.

This prestigious recognition highlights the exceptional care being delivered for patients with brain tumours across our region, from innovative neurosurgery and leading-edge genomics, molecular testing and research, to outstanding nursing support and patient-centred care. The network, which is hosted by Bristol NHS Foundation Trust, provides care for patients with Primary and Secondary brain tumours and support for families from initial diagnosis, ensuring a smooth transition of care from initial surgery, through radiotherapy and/or chemotherapy and into the community.

Bristol is one of six UK neuro-oncology centres awarded on Wednesday 14 October by the Tessa Jowell Brain Cancer Mission (TJBCM).

Read more: [Bristol designated a Tessa Jowell Centre of Excellence for outstanding brain cancer treatment, care and research | Bristol NHS Foundation Trust]

Cancer and Domestic Abuse work recognised nationally

SWAG Cancer Alliance's work to improve support for cancer patients affected by domestic abuse has recently been recognised through both national awards and published research.

An animation developed by the Medical Illustrations Team at Bristol NHS Foundation Trust, Making a Difference: Cancer and Domestic Abuse, received multiple awards from the Institute of Medical Illustrators, helping raise awareness of the often-overlooked link between cancer and domestic abuse – you can watch it here: **Making a Difference: Cancer & Domestic Abuse**

Alongside this, a research paper co-authored by SWAG Clinical Director Helen Winter, highlighted the need for greater support and training for cancer professionals. SWAG Cancer Alliance funds the first dedicated Cancer & Domestic Abuse Practice Education Facilitator role, with Lucy Angell John delivering training to more than 1,300 healthcare professionals since her role began. This work has also led to the co-development of the first Cancer & Domestic Abuse Toolkit with Macmillan Cancer Support and partners, providing practical guidance to help healthcare teams better support patients affected by domestic abuse.

Read more on our Cancer and Domestic abuse work here: [Cancer & Domestic Abuse - SWAG Cancer Alliance]

Young people affected by cancer benefit from Surf Therapy programme

A six-week Surf Therapy programme, funded by SWAG Cancer Alliance and delivered by The Wave Project in partnership with the South West Children, Teenage and Young Adult Cancer Operational Delivery Network, has been supporting children and young people affected by cancer. The six-week pilot programme is designed to build confidence, improve wellbeing and allow children and young people who are living with or recovering from cancer and their siblings the chance to connect with others. Eight young people aged 8 to 18 took part, including five children currently under active cancer care, two siblings and one bereaved sibling.

Read more: Young people affected by cancer benefit from Surf Therapy programme - SWAG Cancer Alliance

Alliance Updates

Spotlight: Meet our 'Alright My Liver?' Pathway Navigator

October marked Liver Cancer Awareness month and we took the opportunity to spotlight our Alright My Liver? Pathway Navigator, Becky Knight who has been supporting patients identified through the programme at Bristol NHS Foundation Trust for the past four years.

Many patients at risk of liver disease face challenges that can make it harder to engage with healthcare. Alongside managing their health, some may be experiencing poor mental health, substance dependency, financial pressures, unstable housing or simply feeling overwhelmed at the thought of appointments. That's where Becky comes in. From arranging transport to providing reassurance and a familiar point of contact, Becky helps ensure patients don't have to face their liver health journey alone.

Read more about Becky's role and the impact it's having on patients across the South West: Helping patients manage their liver health – Meet our 'Alright My Liver?' Pathway Navigator - SWAG Cancer Alliance

SWAG's Neighbourhood Cancer Care Programme Moves Forward

Back in October, we gave an update on the work that we are carrying out in our Neighbourhood Cancer Care programme and we are pleased to update that all four co-creation events have now taken place - one in each of the four ICB footprints: Taunton, Bath, Gloucester and Bristol (supported by The Health Innovation Network).

These events were a great opportunity for stakeholders to come together and share their valuable insights and generate ideas for shaping what neighbourhood Cancer care needs to look like as we move this programme along. 153 attendees from across multiple sectors including NHS Trusts, ICBs, Primary and Community Care, local authorities, universities, VCFSE organisations and patient and community representatives attended and engaged with the sessions, which focussed on three key areas for the framework - Developing a vision, mapping existing activity and opportunities and identifying enablers to make this work possible.

You can read summaries from each of these co-design events on our SWAG website. We had over 50 people express an interest in joining our Steering Group to move this forward, and we have now selected a group of people to represent all sectors and areas across SWAG to help us move this project forward.

We would like to thank everyone who attended one of these events for their extremely valuable contributions on the day.

Find out more about our Neighbourhood Cancer Care Programme here: Neighbourhood Cancer Care - SWAG Cancer Alliance

New Performance Manager joins SWAG: Alec Gear

"I'm Alec and I've recently started in post as Performance Manager here in SWAG Cancer Alliance. I've spent the last five years managing specialties within an acute setting, and before that worked in medical staffing, having studied Philosophy at university.

My role will focus on providing better oversight of performance outlook within our providers as well as identifying, and supporting improvement of, service risks which compromise our adherence with national performance trajectories.

I'm hoping that my experience of the acute environment will help me build strong relationships with our providers and open the door to collaborative and ambitious opportunities to strengthen the provision of cancer care across our communities. I have loved my experience in the role so far and I look forward to spending more time with you all in the coming months!"

Community Teledermatology Hubs coming to Somerset

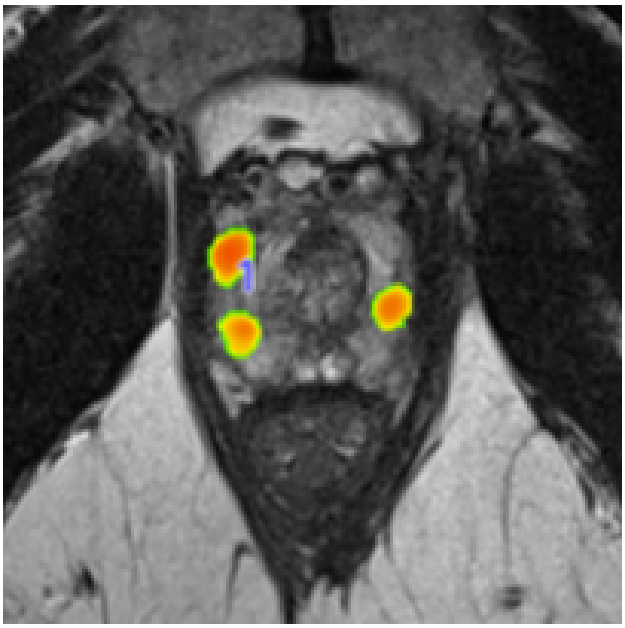
Following initial pilot work undertaken during 2025, Somerset NHS Foundation Trust in partnership with SWAG Cancer Alliance, is progressing plans to introduce community-based teledermatology imaging hubs across Somerset.

The imaging hub model is intended to reduce variation in image quality, improve equity of access across Somerset and maximise the clinical benefits of teledermatology for both patients and healthcare professionals. The hubs are anticipated to be located either within primary care settings or community hospitals.

Last week a short survey was circulated to help us understand current practice, available capacity, and any barriers to the use of telerdermatology for skin cancer referrals. The feedback received will help inform the design of a future pathway that works effectively for both practices and patients.

We look forward to working with Primary Care Networks and practices to develop this important enhancement to the skin cancer pathway.

AI Pilot aims to support faster prostate cancer diagnosis in Gloucestershire



An AI pilot launched at Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust is exploring how artificial intelligence could help improve the prostate cancer diagnostic pathway.

Funded by SWAG Cancer Alliance and led by Bhim Odedra, Consultant Urological Surgeon and Prostate Pathway Clinical Lead, the trial is evaluating Pi™, an AI tool developed by Lucida Medical which was recommended by NICE in their recent article: NICE backs AI prostate cancer detection tools for NHS use in major diagnostic boost | UK Healthcare News

The technology analyses prostate MRI scans, providing risk scores and visual heat maps to support clinical decision-making and help prioritise patients who may be at greatest risk. Early findings from the pilot have been encouraging, with the potential to improve the use of specialist radiology and biopsy resources while supporting faster diagnosis for patients.

Read the full case study to learn more about how Gloucestershire is helping lead the way in the safe and effective use of AI in cancer care: SWAG Cancer Alliance on the leading edge of Artificial Intelligence in the prostate cancer pathway - SWAG Cancer Alliance

SWAG Innovates Together highlights the power of partnership in driving digital innovation and inclusion

Our latest SWAG Innovates Together session took place on Thursday 15th October, highlighting the power of partnership in driving digital innovation and inclusion.

Emma Smith from Caafi Health shared insights from a highly successful programme that has supported over 800 people to access and use the NHS App and Alex Leach from Health Innovation West of England provided an early look at a proposed new digital innovation programme being developed in partnership with SWAG Cancer Alliance.

The initiative aims to empower cancer professionals to identify challenges within services and explore how proven digital solutions could help address them. See the Digital Cancer Innovation Draft Proposal here. The programme is currently being shaped by stakeholder feedback, and NHS Healthcare Professionals and Staff are being encouraged to complete the survey by 20th November here: Cancer Digital Innovation Programme Feedback Survey

You can watch the whole SWAG Innovates Together session here: SWAG Innovates Together highlights the power of partnership in driving digital innovation and inclusion - SWAG Cancer Alliance

New skills and insights sharing pilot launched

SWAG Cancer Alliance is inviting Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) organisations to take part in a new Skills and Insight Sharing Pilot, designed to strengthen partnership working between community organisations and NHS cancer services.

The pilot recognises that reducing cancer inequalities requires collective action. While VCFSE organisations bring valuable knowledge of local communities and the barriers they face in accessing healthcare, NHS professionals bring expertise in cancer pathways, services and systems. This pilot will create dedicated opportunities for both sectors to learn from one another, share insights and work together to identify practical solutions that can improve cancer care.

Participating organisations will be invited to attend one or two reciprocal learning sessions, expected to last either half a day or a full day. The format will be developed collaboratively with organisations selected for the pilot.

Find out more: Skills and Insight Sharing Pilot - SWAG Cancer Alliance

Primary Care Funding Call

We're delighted to announce that 46 primary care projects have been awarded funding across the SWAG region, following an overwhelmingly positive response to our recent funding call. The programme attracted 64 applications, demonstrating both the enthusiasm and commitment of primary care teams to improve cancer outcomes and tackle the challenges they see every day. The quality and variety of applications highlighted a real appetite to test new ideas, share learning and develop innovative approaches to cancer prevention, early diagnosis and reducing inequalities.

The funded projects cover a wide range of priorities, including:

🔍 Improving screening uptake and reducing inequalities
🤝 Community engagement and outreach initiatives
📊 Pathway audits and referral reviews
🎯 Case-finding and risk stratification approaches
📚 Education, training and safety-netting activities

Many projects will contribute to more than one of these areas, reflecting the interconnected nature of improving cancer outcomes within primary care.

Over the coming months, projects will move from planning into delivery, with activity commencing during Q3.

This investment represents an exciting opportunity to strengthen primary care's role in improving cancer outcomes, while generating insights and evidence that could support wider adoption of successful approaches across the SWAG region. We look forward to sharing updates and impact stories as the projects progress.

New Student Accelerator Programme Launched in partnership with UWE Bristol

SWAG Cancer Alliance have partnered with the University of the West of England (UWE) Bristol to deliver a new 18-month programme designed to strengthen the pathway into cancer care for pre-registration healthcare students.

The programme aims to better connect education and cancer learning, developing capability using ACCEND and practice experience, helping students develop the knowledge, capability and experience needed to consider and prepare for careers in cancer services.

Led by SWAG Cancer Alliance, the University of the West of England, Bristol, and wider partners, the programme will bring together existing evidence, education and workforce development activity to develop and evaluate an approach that can inform future adoption across other professions, universities and Cancer Alliances.

Art installation raising awareness of pancreatic cancer to go live this month

A new art installation, funded through SWAG Cancer Alliance and the national pancreatic cancer pilot, will be unveiled at Frome Medical Practice on 19th November, World Pancreatic Cancer Day, to raise awareness of pancreatic cancer and the importance of early diagnosis.

The art installation has been created by artist Caroline Rudge over the last few months, and is titled '800 missed steps'. The number is representative of the number of lives lost each month in the UK to pancreatic cancer.

Members of the public are invited to drop in to view the installation and 'meet the artist' as part of the unveiling of the artwork, from 2pm to 4pm on Thursday 19th November and from midday to 2pm on Saturday 21st November.

📚 Resources, Training & Events

Lunch & Learn for Primary Care: Rare and Less Common Cancers, 10 December, 12:30pm | Online

BSW Training Hub and SWAG Cancer Alliance are delivering this online educational session to explore the recognition, referral pathways and management of rare and uncommon cancers, helping clinicians identify potential signs and symptoms earlier.

Register here: **BSW Lunch & Learn for Primary Care - Rare & Less Common Cancers**

What's new at GatewayC?

- Short read: Breast cancer symptoms beyond a lump. Read now.
- Short read: Breast cancer in men: recognising the barriers to earlier diagnosis. Read now.
- Bonus podcast episode: Is breast pain a symptom of breast cancer? Listen now.
- Bonus podcast episode: Assessing neck lumps. Listen now.
- Course of the month: Breast cancer recurrence. Start now
- Upcoming webinar: Cancer screening for patients with learning disabilities. 18 November, 12:30 – 13:15. Register now

Upcoming webinars from the CRUK and Macmillan GP Community of Practice

Thursday 26th November 1-2pm: Prostate cancer in primary care: Understanding risk & supporting decisions
This is the first in a two-part prostate cancer webinar series from the CRUK and Macmillan GP Community of Practice and will cover prostate cancer risk management in primary care, including PSA testing, symptom investigation, understanding risk in relation to family history and the recent screening recommendation.

Sign up to be part of the Community of Practice and be the first to hear about upcoming webinars here.

Digital Literacy Month E-Learning Resources

As part of Digital Literacy Month, NHS Digital are promoting a set of e-learning resources, co-designed to help health and care staff better understand digital exclusion, recognise barriers faced by different communities and take practical action to support people who may struggle to access online services.

Access the training here and explore practical tools and insights to help make digital services more inclusive and accessible for everyone: NHS App resources for digital inclusion - NHS England Digital

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