



Eich cyf/Your ref: P-05-936
Ein cyf/Our ref VG/00554/20

Janet Finch-Saunders AM
Chair, Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
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16 March 2020

Dear Janet,

Thank you for your letter of 12 February, as Chair of the Petitions Committee, with further questions relating to petition P-05-936 Offer Bowel Cancer Screening after the Age of 74.

As per your request, please find enclosed a copy of the letter from the Chair of the Wales Screening Committee (WSC) to the Chair of the UK National Screening Committee (UKNSC) seeking clarification on the Committee's recommended age range for bowel screening. WSC has not yet received a response to this correspondence, but I will share with the Committee once received.

Cost issues do not form part of the rationale for not allowing self-referral into the bowel screening programme outside of the age range. Therefore the Welsh Government has not costed screening post 74, either on a population basis or in the form of self-referral.

The statement in my letter in response to the Petitions Committee that *"all screening programmes have the potential for harm"* is in reference to a quote from Sir Muir Gray, former Programme Director of the UKNSC: *"All screening programs do harm. Some do good as well and, of these, some do more good than harm at reasonable costⁱ."*

We know that regular bowel cancer screening in the recommended age range reduces the chance of dying from bowel cancer by about 16%, but it is also important to consider that screening does have potential disadvantages which include: the psycho-social consequences of receiving a false-positive test result; the potentially significant complications of having a colonoscopy or a false-negative test result, the possibility of over-diagnosis (leading to unnecessary investigations and/or treatment) and the complications of any associated treatment.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

All screening programmes are introduced for specific age cohorts for which the evidence shows screening provides an overall benefit. Screening outside the recommended age range may well benefit particular individuals but the decision to provide screening to any particular age cohort is based on an assessment of the evidence for the total sum of the harm caused compared to the total sum of the benefit achieved. In other words, it is important that the assessment demonstrates that on balance, screening will do more good than harm in that population.

Rather than expanding the screening programme to include people outside of the recommended age range, our efforts are focussed on expanding the age range in line with UKNSC recommendations (to include those aged 50-59) and encouraging older people who are in the eligible age range to take part in screening when invited.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vaughan Gething". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Vaughan Gething AC/AM

Y Gweinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Minister for Health and Social Services

ⁱ Raffle A, Gray M. Screening. Evidence and Practice. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007