

NEL Cancer Alliance Primary Care Update January / February 2026

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1 Non-specific symptoms (NSS) referrals update

As a reminder, please see the latest update from Barts Health about the closure of the Rapid Diagnostic Centre service at the Royal London Hospital.

It contains important information about referrals for patients with Non-Specific Symptoms: <https://primarycare.northeastlondon.icb.nhs.uk/news/primary-care-update/>

2 National Cancer Plan launched on world cancer day

Launched on 4 February – World Cancer Day - [The National Cancer Plan](#) sets out six core priorities:

- Driving improvements in NHS cancer performance
- Becoming a global leader in cancer outcomes by 2035
- Designing cancer care around people's lives
- Delivering world-class cancer care
- Supporting world-class cancer research
- Tackling cancer in children and young people
- Prioritising rare and less common cancers

3 You Know Them Best Campaign Supporting information for Primary Care

Grace Kelly Childhood Cancer Trust has launched a national public awareness campaign to highlight the early signs and symptoms of childhood cancer. It runs until the end of February, but their resources will be available after that day too.

More information is on their website: <https://www.gkcct.org/youknowthembest/> and resources for GPs are here: <https://www.gkcct.org/medical-professionals/publications-and-resources/gp-education-and-learning-resources/>

4 Fit@80: Lower threshold for bowel screening

NHS England is introducing a lower threshold for the bowel screening test (FIT) to detect smaller amounts of blood in stool samples. The test, offered to 50-74 year-olds, will improve diagnosis, catching potential cancers at an earlier stage when they're easier to treat successfully.

Testing at the lower threshold is expected to identify an additional 600 bowel cancers and 2,000 high-risk polyps every year that might otherwise have been missed. Removing high-risk polyps before they develop into cancer prevents bowel cancer altogether.

The faecal immunochemical test (FIT) screening threshold will be reduced from 120µg/gm to 80µg/gm. This follows recommendations from the UK National Screening Committee that the threshold should be as low as possible to prevent more cancers and improve earlier diagnosis.

Research suggests that this will be a cost-effective way to prevent and detect more cancers earlier, reduce mortality and increase quality of life. The lower threshold test has already been rolled out in early adopter sites, with other sites to follow over the coming months. All screening services are expected to have reduced the screening threshold by the end of 2027/28.

In north east London, BHRUT have been working with the lower threshold since April 25, and Homerton Healthcare will be going live in Q4 26/27.

5 Follow up of women who have been exposed to Diethylstilbesterol (DES)

On 5 November 2025, the Secretary of State recognised the harm inflicted upon individuals who were exposed to Diethylstilbesterol (DES), including links to a rare and distinct type of cancer; reproductive tract abnormalities, and reduced fertility for daughters of women who took DES during pregnancy.

Women who believe or know that they were exposed to DES in utero may need colposcopy which falls outside of the routine screening programme. These women are advised to speak to their GP about this, as the guidance from NHS England sets

out that local arrangements should be made for the follow up of women who have been exposed to DES. Further information is available on the [NHS website](#), which states:

Daughters of individuals exposed to DES are at increased risk of clear cell cancer of the cervix and vagina but not other forms of cervical cancer. There is estimated to be no more than 1 case per year in England and Wales.

Routine call and recall is appropriate. Local arrangements should be made for the follow up of individuals who are DES daughters and have the stigmata of DES exposure. This is usually via annual colposcopy. Requesting cytology even if individuals are hrHPV negative requires local service agreements. Management of any abnormal cytology is outside the programme. Granddaughters of those exposed to DES are not at any increased risk of cervical or vaginal cancer.

Participation in the NHS Breast Screening Programme is also strongly recommended for those who are aware that they were exposed to DES. Pregnant women who know that they were exposed to DES in utero should also inform their obstetrician or midwife, given that there is an increased risk of ectopic pregnancy and preterm labour.

6 Lung cancer screening message for GPs in Barking & Dagenham and Havering only

Thank you for your continued support of the Lung Cancer Screening programme. We're sorry for the delays patients in Barking & Dagenham and Havering are currently experiencing due to the IT system change at BHRUT. We're doing everything we can to regain access to their system so scanning can restart as soon as possible.

As soon as access is restored, we will begin booking patients back into clinics, and we will prioritise those who are overdue for their nodule follow-up. Please be assured this is a priority for us, and we'll keep you updated.

7 Upcoming cancer education sessions

Head & Neck Urgent Suspected Cancer Referral Pathways – Best Practice & Top Tips: 1pm, Wednesday 18 February 2026. Book here:

https://medtribe.com/courses/nel-head-neck-urgent-suspected-cancer-referral-pathways-best-practice-top-tips?utm_medium=copy-link&utm_source=share-modal

Everything you need to know about lung cancer: 1pm, Wednesday 4 March 2026: https://medtribe.com/courses/everything-you-need-to-know-about-lung-cancer?utm_medium=copy-link&utm_source=share-modal

Paediatric and TYA Oncology Care: 12.30pm, Wednesday 11 March 2026. Book here: https://medtribe.com/courses/paediatric-and-tya-oncology-care?utm_medium=copy-link&utm_source=share-modal

8 Oesophageal cancer training

To support education and early diagnosis of oesophageal cancer, the South East Cancer Alliance is highlighting their updated educational module:

Oesophageal Cancer Module

These short form modules support cancer risk factors and symptom awareness, but also referral pathways, case studies and provide key insights from secondary care.

We also have a library of other modules, intended to support early cancer diagnosis and patient management in the community.

To review all previously created modules, [click here!](#)

9 Podcasts

Our podcasts have now been downloaded in over 50 countries! The latest episodes from our series, Taking Control of Cancer, are available here:

<https://www.nelcanceralliance.nhs.uk/taking-control-cancer>

10 Macmillan Cancer Professionals Podcast

The Cancer Professionals Podcast is a bi-monthly podcast for health and social care professionals, which supports learning, raises awareness, and sparks discussion on topics from across the cancer care pathway. They interview a wide range of expert guests - including health and social care professionals and people with lived experience of cancer - to lift the lid on current issues faced by the cancer workforce.

Listen to the podcast here: <https://www.macmillan.org.uk/healthcare-professionals/macmillan-professionals/cancer-professionals-podcast>

11 For more information

Web: www.nelcanceralliance.nhs.uk
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