**Key Stakeholder Briefing
15 June 2023**

**Colorectal Oncology Service**

Our specialist colorectal oncology consultant has left NHS Highland earlier than planned and unfortunately, we have been unable to find a replacement for this highly specialised role. There is a national shortage of trained oncologists with unfilled posts across the UK and despite approaching all independent employment agencies we have not identified suitable cover even on a locum basis. The other consultants in our local cancer service are not specialised in this area of oncology.

We are in discussion with the other cancer centres within Scotland but they are also affected by the shortage of oncologists, particularly those specialising in the treatment of colorectal cancers.  NHS Tayside and NHS Grampian have offered to take a small proportion of our patients and we await support from other Boards to accommodate all of our patients.

This issue was escalated to the Scottish Government National Oncology Co-ordination Group at the end of April and various meetings have taken place to find a solution that will maintain access to treatment for all patients across Scotland. Scottish Government wrote to all Boards 10 days ago requiring a solution is developed to support our patients but at this time we do not have an indication of when this will occur.

This unfortunately means patients in NHS Highland and the Western Isles are likely to experience delay and disruption to their treatment until we can find a replacement or a national solution for all our patients is developed.  We have written to all 78 patients affected to explain that their consultant has left.

Yesterday, it was agreed on the advice of professional medical, nursing and pharmacy colleagues that it was no longer safe to continue administering chemotherapy to those patients who are not under the clinical supervision of a colorectal oncology consultant. . We are currently suspending treatment for these and are unable to commence treatment for 13 patients identified as requiring chemotherapy. This position will be under continuous review but at this time we are sorry that we are unable to advise our patients of when their chemotherapy treatments will be offered.

For our patients this will be a very worrying time and personal contact is being made with these patients through their specialist nurse. For our staff this is also a challenging situation to face which is unprecedented and we thank them for their continued dedication to their roles.

Pam Dudek Chief Executive and Boyd Peters Medical Director have been involved in highlighting at a national level. Work is continuing to seek a full resolution to this issue.

**Feedback**

If you have comments or queries please contact nhshighland.feedback@nhs.scot