

Greater access to genetic testing needed for cancer diagnosis and treatment

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Credit: Cancer Research UK

Cancer patients should have routine access to genetic testing to improve diagnosis and treatment, according to England's chief medical officer.

Despite the UK being a world leader in [genomic medicine](#) its full potential is still not being realised, Professor Dame Sally Davies said in a [new report](#).

Davies urged clinicians and the Government to work together and make wider use of new genetic techniques in an attempt to improve [cancer](#) survival rates.

Genetic testing can pinpoint the faults in DNA that have led to a cancer forming. Different cancers have different faults, and these determine which treatments may or may not work.

Such testing could lead to patients being diagnosed faster and receiving more targeted or precise treatments.

Davies said that "the age of precision medicine is now" and that the NHS must act quickly to remain world class.

"This technology has the potential to change medicine forever but we need all NHS staff, patients and the public to recognise and embrace its huge potential." said Davies.

Sir Harpal Kumar, Cancer Research UK's chief executive, agreed, saying that it would be a disservice to patients if the UK were slow to respond to innovations in this area.

The report recommends that within 5 years training should be available to current and future clinicians and that all patients should be being offered genomic tests just as readily as they're given MRI scans today.

Davies also called for research and international collaboration to be prioritised, along with investment in research and services so that patients across the country have equal access.

However the report recognises potential challenges such as data protection issues and attitudes of clinicians and the public.

"This timely report from the chief medical officer showcases just how much is now possible in genomics research and care within the NHS," added Sir Kumar.

"Cancer Research UK is determined to streamline research, to find the right clinical trial for [cancer patients](#) and to ensure laboratory discoveries benefit patients".

And the design of clinical trials are starting to change. A number of trials are underway, like Cancer Research UK's National Lung Matrix Trial with AstraZeneca and Pfizer, where [patients](#) with a certain type of lung cancer are assigned a specific treatment based on the genetic makeup of their cancer.

However, Sir Harpal Kumar stressed that to bring the report's vision to life the Government, the NHS, regulators and research funders need to act together.

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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