West Midlands cancer alliance

NHS

WMCA Patient Advocate Handbook

A Helpful Guide for all Patient Advocates

Welcome to the team

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Welcome from the Managing Director

The West Midlands Cancer Alliance (WMCA) Patient Advocate Handbook has been developed to provide information to Patient Advocates, both existing and newly appointed, to ensure that they have a guide to support their volunteer role supporting the Alliance to transform cancer services.

West Midlands Cancer Alliance is committed to putting people affected by cancer at the heart of improving cancer services for the population of the West Midlands.

"Thank you for choosing to support us as a Patient Advocate and for the important role you play in improving local cancer services. We're thrilled to have you on board at WMCA and look forward to working with you"

Sarah Hughes, Managing Director – West Midlands Cancer Alliance

- WMCA are committed to the involvement of people affected by cancer at all levels of our work
- The involvement of people affected by cancer is crucial to the development of our services
- People affected by cancer involved in our work will be giving up their time to influence and improve cancer services in the West Midlands. They should be made welcome and treated with respect
- We will make sure that those affected by cancer involved in our work are listened to and their contribution valued
- We will provide support and appropriate training to help patient advocates contribute
- We will make sure that privacy of our patient advocates is respected and any information shared is kept confidential
- Effective communication will underpin the effective involvement of people affected by cancer in the work of West Midlands Cancer Alliance

What is West Midlands Cancer Alliance?

West Midlands Cancer Alliance is one of 21 alliances funded by the Government to help deliver the National Cancer Plan published in February 2026.

West Midlands Cancer Alliance provides strategic leadership to improve cancer patients' outcomes both in terms of survival and experience of care. This extends from prevention strategies, through screening and early diagnosis, delivery of evidence-based treatment, living with and beyond cancer, palliative and supportive care to end of life care.

The Cancer Alliance is seen as the vehicle for sharing best practice and innovation, identifying, and addressing variation and inequity where it exists, integrating care pathways, monitoring performance, and supporting providers to provide high-quality, cost-effective care.

The Cancer Alliance Board provides leadership to ensure successful delivery of the Alliance's programme of work, including that local plans are aligned and support Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) and transformation across the West Midlands. It will function as the decision-making body in relation to the planning and delivery of the Cancer strategy locally.

What We Do

Cancer Alliances look at the care and support patient populations should expect to receive, covering the whole pathway from prevention and screening programmes to living with and beyond cancer, so we can address variations in treatment and care provision to ensure equal access and implement best practice The Cancer Alliances are provided with funding, support and guidance to assist in their work.

West Midlands Cancer Alliance fosters productive partnerships with and between the Integrated Care Boards (ICBs), commissioners (including specialised commissioners), specialised service networks (for example radiotherapy networks), service providers (including GPs, other primary and social care providers and NHS Trusts) and patient groups, and has established robust governance to bind these partnerships together. Within the West Midlands there are fifteen service providers (hospitals).

Further information can be found on our website: Home - West Midlands Cancer Alliance

How the Alliance Works with Patients and the Public

Patient Advocates are recruited for involvement because of their first-hand experiences, but this should not be confused with recruitment for employment. Advocates are recruited to function as the guardian of the patient and public voice, not in a personal capacity and are asked to do so on a voluntary basis.

Accepting a role as a patient advocate does not constitute a contract of employment and any advocate may decide to discontinue involvement at any time in line with their health needs, personal or carer commitments. However, there is an expectation for patient advocates to act in a manner appropriate to the organisation and as an ambassador for the NHS.

West Midlands Cancer Alliance (WMCA) has a number of ways that you can get involved and represent the patient voice to help us deliver high quality cancer services, particularly if you have had cancer, are a carer or someone who has been affected by cancer and want to help improve the delivery of cancer services across the West Midlands.

The ways to become involved are:

- Become a Patient Advocate on one of our Expert Advisory Groups (EAGs). Other groups are available to join if you have interest in Data, Performance, Inequality, Finance, Innovations, Workforce, and others
- Join our wider virtual group of engaged patients and receive regular updates on the Alliance's activities and provide input to the Alliance without attending meetings
- Join our Readers' Panel by completing an application form and indicating your choice
- The Alliance Board have two patient representatives who function as conduits for the patient advocates who work with the Alliance
- Get involved in your local area with a patient group or charity or join your patient group associated with your Trust or your Integrated Care Board (ICB)

Working in partnership with our Patient Advocates and other stakeholders provides several opportunities:

To learn more, please email: rwh-tr.wmcanceralliance@nhs.net

The Patient Experience Strategy can be found at: WMCA Involvement and Engagement Strategy

Standards of Business Conduct

West Midlands Cancer Alliance follows the seven principles of public life – the 'Nolan Principles' – which underpin the Policy:

- **Selflessness**
- **Integrity**
- **Objectivity**
- **Accountability**
- **Openness**
- **Honesty**
- **Leadership**

The values enshrined in the NHS Constitution underpin all that we do.

Values and Ways of Working

All our representatives must be able to participate without fear of discrimination based on ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, class, age, gender identity, gender presentation, language, ability or disability, asylum status, political or religious affiliation. Constructive criticism is welcome, but should be focused on the issue, not the person. Everyone is entitled to their own views and beliefs, and we expect everyone to be respectful when there are personal differences.

What is a Patient Advocate

Type of Role: Voluntary, unpaid role with reasonable travel expenses paid in accordance with NHS policy and pre-approval by the Alliance's senior leadership group.

WMCA was set up following recommendations of the Cancer Taskforce in 2016 and is one of 21cancer alliances around England. It brings together clinical and managerial leaders from different hospital trusts and other health and social care organisations, to transform the diagnosis, treatment, and care for cancer patients in their local area.

The Alliance looks at the whole pathway of cancer care and is the vehicle for sharing best practice and innovation, identifying, and addressing variation, integrating care pathways, monitoring performance, and supporting providers to provide high-quality, cost-effective care. It provides leadership to ensure successful delivery, including local plans aligned to Integrated Care Boards (ICB) and transformation across the West Midlands. It is also a decision-making body in relation to the planning and delivery of the Cancer strategy locally. The Alliance works closely with the Integrated Care Boards (ICBs), Provider Trusts in the West Midlands.

About you

We are looking for people who have experience of cancer services as a patient, carer or relative. You will be enthusiastic about wanting to improve the quality of services for people affected by cancer and should be willing to use your experience and that of others to contribute to improving services . You will also be capable of listening to, valuing, and gathering the views and experiences of other people and communicating views and opinions to anyone involved with the transformation and improvement of cancer services in the West Midlands

Eligibility for role

- You have been treated for cancer or have cared for someone who has received treatment for cancer, within the past five years dependent on experience, or as agreed on an individual basis with the Alliance. If you are a carer, this must be in a personal and unpaid capacity
- The treatment for cancer has been received in the WMCA region

"Being a WMCA Patient Advocate allows me to make a meaningful difference during some of the most challenging moments.

I'm motivated by the opportunity to contribute and improve cancer care, whilst being part of a community that is dedicated to compassion, hope and better outcomes for all."

Phil Barrett, Patient Advocate at West Midlands Cancer Alliance.

What can you be involved in

Expert Advisory Groups

West Midlands Cancer Alliance (WMCA) provides support to Expert Advisory Groups (EAGs). The overall aims of these clinical groups are to provide specialist advice and guidance to the WMCA Board on the standards of service for patients with cancer reflecting Improving Outcomes Guidance (IOG) recommendations, current best practice, and opportunities for development. The EAGs meet at least every three months and are made up of Multi-Disciplinary Team Leads for each of the provider organisations where those cancer services are held and other clinical parties in a position to deliver transformation of cancer services.

Other clinicians may be co-opted to attend these meetings when required. There are usually 2-3 Patient Advocates who are assigned to each of the EAGs to provide the patient perspective during discussions, this is not a forum for individual patient issues.

West Midlands Cancer Alliance Board

There are two Patient Advocate representatives sitting on the Board for the Alliance. A Patient Advocate update is presented at each Board meeting. The Board meets in person on a bi-monthly schedule. The tenure of each representative is three years.

Readers' Panel

Any documents developed to be shared members of public are reviewed by our Readers' Panel before being published. The Readers' Panel is made up of Patient Advocates. When reviewing the document(s) they are looking to ensure content is clear and easy to read; logical and easy to understand; it contains nothing offensive; contains no jargon and is well-written with good gram-mar, correct punctuation and contains no spelling mistakes.

Support Community Projects

There are several community projects taking place across the West Midlands and Patient Advocates may choose to participate in those projects as an organiser or stakeholder. You may be representing the Alliance or the support group or both.

Patient Storytellers

The Alliance is collating a repository (library) of patient stories. These stories are used for illustration for good practice and for those areas that require improvement. Hearing an individual's experiences is vital to aid with the transformation of cancer services. If you are willing to share your story, we would love to hear from you.

If you would like to learn more about any of the opportunities above, please contact the Alliance via email rwh-tr.wmcanceralliance@nhs.net

Your skills, experience, and qualities

- Recent experience of cancer services as a patient, carer, relative or member of the public within the past five years
- Possible recent/continued membership of a cancer support or involvement group
- Clear and concise communicator with empathy for others
- Ability to review complex documentation for relevant information
- Understanding of the patient perspective in the wider context of cancer services and health care
- Basic knowledge and understanding of the NHS
- Approachable with a constructive, positive attitude
- Confident communicating within mixed groups of health professionals and patients
- Ability to listen to others and express own view clearly and succinctly
- Ability to articulate a patient perspective beyond personal experience where necessary
- Desire to aid continuous improvement and to 'make a difference'
- Flexibility and ability to use own initiative

Your Commitment to Us

- Support WMCA's service improvement work by engaging constructively with healthcare professionals, patients, carers, and the wider public
- Attend meetings reliably and conduct yourself in a professional, respectful, and courteous manner always
- Use insights gathered from patient and public interactions to raise relevant questions in meetings, ensuring you represent the collective patient perspective rather than personal opinions
- Respond to email requests for feedback, comments, or information in a timely and thoughtful way
- Prepare thoroughly for meetings by reading papers in advance and staying informed about developments in the national cancer programme
- Meet regularly with the groups you support, maintaining open communication and building strong working relationships
- Provide high level feedback on patient experience, focusing on strategic themes rather than local or individual issues
- Direct local concerns to the most appropriate organisation or service so they can be addressed at the right level

- Promote collaborative working across organisations and teams to help drive improvements in cancer services
- Maintain awareness of your own wellbeing, recognising when to set boundaries and avoid taking on more than you can manage
- Stay familiar with relevant national programmes and future plans, ensuring your contributions are informed and up to date
- Let WMCA know if you need additional support or training to conduct your role effectively as a patient advocate

Our Commitment to you

- Send meeting papers by email in good time
- Use plain language without jargon or acronyms
- Follow NHS information governance policies
- Reimburse reasonable travel and other out of pocket expenses when attendance has been approved by WMCA Senior Leadership
- Fund and support travel arrangements for meetings held outside the West Midlands
- Hold meetings in accessible venues and provide clear directions
- Schedule meetings at convenient times and make reasonable adjustments where needed
- Provide mentoring and support when required
- Provide appropriate training for the role
- Meet with you regularly to ensure you feel supported and informed in your role as a patient advocate

Recruitment Process

On receipt of an expression of interest, either by completing the form on the WMCA website or by emailing the Alliance's generic email account.

An online informal meeting will be held with the applicant and the Project Improvement Manager – People and Community Engagement. Following this meeting, which will include an exchange of information, an online meeting will be arranged with the pathway lead for the appropriate area for interests and experience. Once this has taken place and the applicant has been confirmed as suitable and they are still interested, the new applicant will receive Induction training. Once completed, all consent forms will be sent to the applicant for signature.

On receipt of the signed documents, their name will be added to the Patient Advocate database, and they will be added to the next cohort of the Patient Advocate Training Programme. It will be the responsibility of the Pathway Lead to tell them more about the meeting arrangements plus make the introductions to the Chairs of those meetings.

Patient Advocate Training Programme

The WMCA provides a six module training programme for their Patient Advocates. Each new Patient Advocate will be invited to attend the next available cohort and will take place after the Induction programme. The training is mixture of online and face-to-face training. Once booked we ask that delegates endeavour to attend the sessions.

Expenses

Travel expenses: Individuals who use their own car to travel to and from the site at which they are volunteering at, will be reimbursed for a maximum mileage of fifteen miles per day. When patients and carers are travelling by personal vehicle, they must have a valid UK (United Kingdom) driving licence, and the vehicle must have valid insurance, tax, and MOT certificate.

Parking costs (for the duration of the event only) up to £13 will be reimbursed on production of a receipt.

Public transport: Travel costs to attend meetings and events will be paid on production of a receipt of the costs. Taxis will be considered on an individual basis. Please speak to the Project Improvement Manager in advance of the meeting as this will require authorisation.

Train Tickets: Will be purchased on your behalf but must be booked at least two weeks prior to the meeting or event you wish to attend.

Lunch and refreshments: On occasions when lunch is not provided during face-to-face meetings over three hours, patient representatives can claim back up to £5 on production of a receipt.

For expense application forms, please contact the WMCA generic email address: rwh-tr.wmcanceralliance@nhs.net

Expenses can be claimed monthly using the WMCA application form. Requests for a form should be submitted to the generic email address above. The process will be administered by the Project Improvement Manager and supported by Business Administration. Applications must be supported by receipts and can only be processed respectively for three months.

Information and forms

You will be sent some documents electronically along with this handbook. The documents we send you will depend on the activities you would like to be involved with. Please read and complete.

On receipt of the completed forms your name will be added to our Patient Advocate database.

- Patient Advocate Role Description (including sections about Readers' Panel and Storyteller roles)
- Confidentiality clause
- Readers' Panel consent form
- Storyteller consent form
- Quote and photograph consent form

Conflict of Interest

It is possible that there is a conflict of interest. The Cancer Alliance must record this. A QR code will be included in the agenda and at the beginning of every meeting. Members of the group will be asked to identify if there is a Conflict of Interest. The QR code takes the individual to the Form to complete. For more information about Conflict of Interest, please contact the generic email address: rwh-tr.wmcanceralliance@nhs.net

NHS Glossary

AKI	Acute Kidney Injury
AOS	Acute Oncology Service
BCBHBV	Better Care Better Health Better Value
BME	Black and Ethnic Minority
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CNS	Clinical Nurse Specialist
CQC	Care Quality Commission
CUP	Cancer of Unknown Primary
CWPT	Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership Trust (Mental Health)
DTB	Digital Transformation Board
EAG	Expert Advisory Group
EqUIP	Equalities and Inclusion Partnership
FDS	Faster Diagnosis Standard
FOI	Freedom of Information
GEH	George Eliot Hospital (Nuneaton)
GP	General Practitioner
HNA	Holistic Needs Assessment
HR	Human Resources
HWC	Healthwatch Coventry
HWE	Healthwatch England

HWW	Healthwatch Warwickshire
ICPV	Independent Cancer Patient Voice
ICS/ICB	Integrated Care System/Integrated Care Board
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
Key Performance Indicator	Local Authority
LA	Local Authority
LHW	Local Healthwatch
LMC	Local Medical Committee
LTP	NHS Long Term Plan
LWBC	Living with and Beyond Cancer
MDT	Multi-disciplinary Team (Surgeons, Oncologists, CNS, Pathologists, Radio-lo-gists etc. - your cancer team)
Mets	Metastases – spread of cancer to other organs e.g. liver, brain, lungs, bones
MSCC	Metastatic Spinal Cord Compression
NAPP	National Association of Patient Participation
HEE	Health Education England
NHSE	National Health Service England
HWB	Health and Wellbeing Board (Council)
NCRAS	National Cancer Registry and Analytical Service
NICE	National Institute for Health and Care Excellence
NOG	Network Oversight Group – associated with RT EAG
NRT	Nicotine Replacement Therapy
NWCCG	North Warwickshire Clinical Commissioning Group
OOH	Out Of Hours e.g. GP
PCN	Primary Care Network
PHE	Public Health England

National Cancer Plan

National Cancer Plan for England February 2026

Department of Health & Social Care

NHS FIT FOR THE FUTURE

The National Cancer Plan for England: delivering world class cancer care

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