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## **Advocating for secondary breast cancer care and enabling equitable access**

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## TITLE: ADVOCACY FOR SECONDARY BREAST CANCER CARE & EQUITABLE ACCESS

Each year more than 11,000 women in the UK will die from breast cancer. The UK spends significantly less than the G7 average on health care (Rocks and Giulia 2021) and sadly, the relative survival for breast cancer in women is below the European average in England (Cancer Research UK 2022). Therefore, advocacy is vital, to engage our political leaders and decision-makers to invest in and improve equity and outcomes in our services nationally and internationally.

I have been working with a group of engaged patients to raise their concerns on services for secondary (metastatic) breast cancer and highlight issues of equity relative to other parts of the UK as we await our 10-year Northern Ireland Cancer Strategy.

These women have been putting together a photographic exhibition entitled 'Seen to be Heard', taking place in April. This depicts portraits, poetry and personal testimonies of their experiences living with secondary breast cancer in Northern Ireland. The exhibit will describe their challenges in accessing clinical trials and accessing the same range of drugs and treatments available to patients in the rest of the UK, as well as limited provision of specialist metastatic disease nurses to support their care. Through my engagement with this work, I'm reminded of the issues facing people with this disease and channel the learning back to see how we can bring about improvements to the care they are receiving. It continues to be my privilege to advocate on behalf of these women to support their drive to improve secondary breast cancer services.

Over the past year as a committee member of the RCN Cancer and Breast Care Forum, I met with clinicians, charities, politicians and pharmaceutical companies and contributed to the COVID-19 recovery and service delivery plan for secondary (metastatic) breast cancer in England (Gordon 2021). Indeed this successfully led to funding the English secondary breast care audit (Breast Cancer Now 2021) – the first such audit in the UK.

This work was not funded for patients from all parts of the UK to take part. Based on this understanding I acted locally in Northern Ireland to support our patients' involvement in a national benchmarking effort. Unfortunately, existing legislation currently prevents participation due to the use of secondary data legislation (Health and Social Care (Control of Data Processing) Act (Northern Ireland) 2016). Therefore, my advocacy work on behalf of the Forum continues, along with the Northern Ireland Cancer Registry, to raise this issue with local politicians.

As a forum committee member, I'm mindful that COVID has affected all aspects of breast cancer services, especially screening attendances, whilst advocacy to support changes to services for those living with incurable breast cancer is crucial, I must also highlight that prevention can save lives. When diagnosed at early, 98% of people with breast cancer will survive their disease for five years or more, compared with around 1 in 4 (26%) people when the disease is diagnosed at the latest stage (Cancer Research UK 2022) – so please support women around you and in your care to take up their screening invites.

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**Committee member of the RCN Cancer and Breast Care Forum**

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