

2021



2022

End of Year: Irish Cancer Society Strong Focus in Catching Undetected Cancer



Written by Ciarán D'Arcy, Communications Officer,
Irish Cancer Society



The dual threats of Covid and the HSE cyberattack meant that 2021 was a particularly challenging year for cancer care, and one in which the Irish Cancer Society dedicated a resultant strong focus on catching cancers that may have gone undetected during the pandemic.

Research carried out on behalf of the Society in May of this year found that 1 in 6 people were choosing not to attend a GP with health concerns amid the ongoing uncertainty caused by the pandemic, prompting concern in relation to symptomatic potential cancer cases.

In response to this the Society rolled out a series of early detection campaigns to encourage anyone with cancer symptoms to see their doctor, utilising the heightened focus associated with high-profile awareness events for a range of malignancies including lung, breast, bowel and skin cancers to connect with members of the public about their health concerns and signpost them for help.

These efforts culminated in the Society's first-ever Your Health Matters early detection roadshow visiting shopping centres around

the country from September, offering free health checks and providing information on cancer symptoms, how they can be recognised and what to do if someone has a health worry.

Beyond the importance of physical wellbeing, we are also acutely aware of the great emotional hardship visited on cancer patients over the course of a turbulent and unpredictable year.

Thanks to the generosity of public support for the second annual Daffodil Day in a row where our fundraisers could not be on the streets we were able to redouble our efforts to attempt to meet this new level of need, dedicating a record €800k in funding to provide access to free counselling sessions both on an in-person and a remote basis for anyone affected by cancer in 2021.

The success of Daffodil Day also allowed the Society to substantially increase its funding to Cancer Trials Ireland to a total of €1m in 2021, with further attention being drawn to the challenges faced by cancer researchers with clinical trials activity falling by almost half during the height of Covid disruption.

Our nurses continued to provide helpful information, advice and support to those impacted by cancer both through our Freephone 1800 200 700 Support Line, our Daffodil Centres and our end-of-life Night Nursing service, and we were able to welcome back many of our dedicated Volunteer Drivers who were forced to cocoon during the pandemic as they once again took up the mantle to transport cancer patients to treatment sessions.

In addition to the practical support provided by our services we were delighted to partner in the launch of a new one-stop-shop online resource for reliable, relevant and evidence-based information on gynaecological cancers on ThisIsGo.ie.

The platform, which was developed in association with the Irish Cancer Society Women's Health Initiative by consultant gynaecological oncologist Prof Donal Brennan and psychotherapist Yvonne O'Meara, features over 130 different articles, videos and audio content covering every stage of cancer diagnosis, treatment, and life with and after cancer through a personalised experience tailored to the stage and needs of individual users, including a specific section for partners of women who have or have had cervical cancer.

We were delighted to be able to offer a range of extended supports for the families of children, adolescents and young adults who have been dealt a cancer diagnosis in 2021 including increasing our Children's Fund grant to €3k and making it easier to access so that more families can be supported through treatment, and the introduction of a funded nurse liaison post in Children's Health Ireland Crumlin.

We are also looking forward to extending our Volunteer Driver Service specifically for children to start in the Greater Dublin Area on an initial pilot basis from early next year.

The Society's Decoding Cancer podcast returned for a second series this year to help answer the public's big cancer questions, with clinicians, patients and survivors joining host and Irish Cancer Society Director of Research Dr Robert O'Connor to discuss a diverse set of topics such as exercise, nutrition and cancer, Ireland's proud contribution to global cancer research breakthroughs, and what cancer advice is trustworthy.

The Clinician Research Leadership Award scheme aimed at protecting dedicated research time for clinicians is going from strength to strength with consultant plastic and reconstructive surgeon and researcher Dr Shirley Potter and consultant medical oncologist Dr Dearbhaile Collins selected to advance projects focusing on melanoma and lung cancer in 2021.

Our advocacy work continued apace with a series of reports focusing on waiting lists for cancer genetic services, the issues that cancer patients and survivors face in returning to work, and costs associated with a diagnosis of childhood cancer for families.

We also heard an update from the Childhood Cancer Fertility Project in which we are partnered with the Merrion Fertility Clinic that a total of 17 young people were assisted with fertility preservation over the course of the project's first year.

All the while our commitment to helping cancer patients navigate their way through a troubling and at times traumatic period caused by the pandemic and the fallout from the cyberattack remains steadfast, and as we hope and prepare for better times ahead for our cancer community we continue to encourage anyone in need of help, advice or even just a listening ear to get in touch with our Support Line on 1800 200 700 and SupportLine@IrishCancer.ie.