
Rt Hon George Osborne MP
HM Treasury
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

4th February 2016

Dear Chancellor

On World Cancer Day, I write on behalf of Breast Cancer UK, to urge the UK Government to promote fiscal measures to help support the prevention of cancer and to invest in research that helps us to better understand and tackle the environmental causes of cancer.

Half of us are predicted to get cancer at some point in our lives and by 2030 it is expected that 4 million of us will be living with cancer. The UK age-standardised incidence rate for breast cancer alone has increased by 5.5%, between 2004 and 2013¹ - a rise that cannot be explained away by any significant change in women's lifestyle, genetics or in an increase in screening, which has stayed roughly the same over the last decade. Prostate cancer has also similarly increased; during the same period the UK age-standardised rate has risen by 6.3%.

The rising costs of cancer will place an enormous burden on the NHS, and the wider economy. The cost to the UK of breast cancer alone is an estimated £1.5 billion each year, with the average 15-month health-care costs estimated to be £12,595 per-patient². The NHS will not be able to cope with the rising number of cancer patients. Yet, if we reduce annual breast cancer rates by just 10%, potential savings of around £51 million could be achieved.

Cancer strategies and investment currently focus on treating the disease: we are failing to tackle it at the source. Research funding into breast cancer prevention has diminished significantly over the past decade. Annual research funding into breast cancer prevention (CSO3) has fallen from a high of 5.76% in 2003 to a figure closer to around 2-2.5%, over the last decade (with a slight and welcome rise last year up to 3.96%). Research funding directed toward prevention of prostate cancer fares even worse, with only 0.4% of total annual funds spent on prevention in 2003.

The derisory amount of expenditure on research to identify and better understand the exogenous causes of the disease is also of great concern. It is estimated that the vast majority of breast cancer cases are attributable to exogenous causes, with between 20-30%³ of cases being thought to be attributable to genetic inheritance. Of the remaining 70-80%, we know around a quarter are likely to be as a result of lifestyle choices⁴. This means that over 40% have unknown causes⁵. Despite

¹Office of National Statistics (2015) Cancer Registration Statistics, England, 2013, 10 July 2015 http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_409714.pdf [Accessed: 25 January, 2016]

² Hall et al. (2015). Costs of cancer care for use in economic evaluation: a UK analysis of patient-level routine health system data. *British Journal of Cancer*. 112(5): 948-56

³ Economopoulou et al. (2015). Beyond BRCA: New hereditary breast cancer susceptibility genes. *Cancer Treatment Reviews* 41: 1-8

⁴ E.g. alcohol consumption (6%), post-menopausal hormones (3%), being overweight (9%) occupational risk (5%) and lack of exercise (3%). Radiation exposure is thought to account for 1%.

this, in 2014, just 1% of UK breast cancer research funding focused on the exogenous causes of the disease. In 2002 this figure was 5.1%⁶. The situation is similar for prostate cancer. In 2013 just 0.4% of research funding went to understanding the exogenous causes of this disease (down from 9.8% in 2002) yet the majority of prostate cancers have unknown etiology⁷.

It is vital that work to identify ***all*** of the causes of breast cancer is encouraged and not just the intrinsic or lifestyle risk factors. Only by better understanding the causes of the disease can we hope to better prevent it. Cutting health prevention research and reducing investment into identifying causes of cancers is a false economy and we call on the UK Government to support measures that reverse this trend.

I have enclosed a series of postcards, which illustrate the disparity that exists between efforts to prevent and understand the causes of breast cancer and the rising costs and incidence rate of the disease.

I urge the Government to take steps to address this disparity as a matter of urgency.

Yours sincerely

Lynn Ladbrook
Chief Executive
Breast Cancer UK

⁵ Parkin et al. (2011). 'The Fraction of cancer attributable to lifestyle and environmental factors in the UK in 2010' British Journal of Cancer (2011) 105, S77-s81

⁶ Source: NCRI Breast Cancer Spend 2002-2014

⁷ NHS choices Prostate Cancer Causes. <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Cancer-of-the-prostate/Pages/Causes.aspx> [accessed February 3, 2016]