



The Rt Hon Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London SW1H 0EU

Thursday, 02 April 2026

Dear Secretary of State,

Thank you for leading on the National Cancer Plan (2026) which is a vital step for improving patient care, particularly with its core ambition to help people "live well" after treatment. However, as we look toward putting this plan into practice, the Intensive Care Society is keen to help your department address a crucial gap in the system that currently leaves too many patients struggling to regain their independence after life-saving surgery.

The vital period immediately following a major operation, which is often spent in intensive care, is where a patient's recovery frequently stalls. A recent national report, *Recovery Beyond Survival (2025)*, highlighted this challenge: **80% of intensive care patients do not receive a formal assessment of their rehabilitation needs while on the unit.** If we do not address this, the promise of "living well" risks remaining out of reach for many who have successfully survived their cancer treatment.

To help the National Cancer Plan deliver on its promises and reduce the burden on community services, the Intensive Care Society proposes three practical steps. These are drawn directly from our established national standards (the Guidelines for the Provision of Intensive Care Services):

- **Rehabilitation assessments within 24 hours** of a cancer patient arriving in an intensive care unit. Physical and mental health recovery must begin at the bedside immediately, rather than delaying until hospital discharge.
- **The ongoing plan must move with the patient** when patients are well enough to be stepped down from an intensive care unit to a surgical ward. This guarantees that the "named lead contact" promised in your Cancer Plan is handed a clear, continuous roadmap to get the patient home safely.
- **Integration of allied health professionals** (including, but not limited to, physiotherapists, speech and language therapists, and psychologists) from the start. These specialised staff are key to providing effective rehabilitation and early integration into the cancer pathway will prevent patients from lapses in their recovery (a leading cause of delayed hospital discharges and readmissions).

I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss how the Intensive Care Society can support the successful delivery of the National Cancer Plan, ensuring that surviving cancer truly means getting back to a full, active life.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Shondipon Laha' with a small flourish at the end.

Professor Shondipon Laha BM BCh MA (Oxon) FRCA FFICM
Intensive Care Society President

[Intensive Care Society](#) | 7-9 Breems Buildings | London | EC4A 1DT
T: +44 (0)20 7280 4350 E: info@ics.ac.uk W: www.ics.ac.uk

Patron: [HRH The Princess Royal](#)