

Science and Technology Committee

House of Commons London SW1A 0AA
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From Rt Hon Norman Lamb MP, Chair

Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Secretary of State for Health & Social Care
Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
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NHS Genomics Testing Services tendering

I am writing to ask for your assessment of concerns we have been made aware of regarding the current NHS tendering process for Genomics Testing Services. These have been raised by ThermoFisher, whose correspondence with us is attached.

At its board meeting on 30 March 2017, NHS England stated its expectation to “commission whole genome sequencing and embed genomic medicine into routine care pathways where it is clinically and cost effective to do so”. During the course of our recent inquiry into ‘genomics and genome editing in the NHS’, we heard scepticism that whole genome sequencing could, initially at least, represent the optimum diagnostic for those suffering common forms of cancer. One of the main reasons for this regarded the urgency with which cancer patients need to receive their results, and the current turnaround times achievable for whole genome sequencing.

As part of its drive towards the establishment of a Genomic Medicine Service later this year, the NHS opened a tendering process for the provision of NHS Genomic Testing Services on 21 December 2017. A decision on the successful bid for the tendering process is expected, I understand, on 1 June this year. The service specification documentation for this tender suggests that the specified turnaround times for genomic testing – whole genome sequencing or otherwise – for most forms of cancers will be 21 days. This is longer than the 14 days that ThermoFisher, and others who gave evidence during our inquiry, recommend for patient welfare.

ThermoFisher have also raised concerns to us regarding the potential for the centralised ‘hub and spoke’ model for the Genomic Laboratory Hubs to lead to a monopoly being created among commercial providers of genomic tests, with consequent detriment for cost and risk.

I would therefore be grateful if you could provide your assessment of the following issues:

- How do the turnaround times for cancer testing specified in the tender documentation compare to current requirements and actual performance? Are there any cancers for

which the required turnaround times in the tender specifications are longer than is currently required?

- What assessment has been made of the potential for the establishment of the Genomic Laboratory Hubs to create a monopoly among genomic test providers, and for the potential risks this could present to patients and the NHS?

In our report we recommended that “in advance of the launch of the Genomic Medicine Service, NHS England should undertake and publish a detailed evaluation of the 100,000 Genomes Project, to inform an assessment of the anticipated clinical- and cost-effectiveness of routine whole genome sequencing in the NHS”. I look forward to receiving the Government’s response to this and other recommendations from our report in due course.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Norman Lamb', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rt Hon Norman Lamb MP
Chair