

Glossary for NBOCA State of the Nation Report, October 2026

Adjuvant chemotherapy - Chemotherapy provided after the primary treatment (e.g. surgery) to improve the effectiveness of the primary treatment and reduce the chance of recurrence of the cancer.

ACPGBI - The Association of Coloproctology of Great Britain and Ireland

Anterior resection - A surgical procedure to remove part or all of the rectum. After removing the required portion of the rectum, the procedure involves re-joining the two ends together using either a series of sutures (stitches) or staples. This is called an anastomosis.

BRAF and RAS – Genes that can be altered (mutated) in bowel cancer. Testing for mutations in BRAF and RAS (including KRAS and NRAS) can help determine which treatments may be most appropriate, particularly for people with advanced bowel cancer.

Cancer Alliance - A regional partnership of NHS organisations, local authorities, and other stakeholders working together to improve cancer care across a defined geographical area in England.

CEU - The Clinical Effectiveness Unit of the Royal College of Surgeons is an academic collaboration between The Royal College of Surgeons of England and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and undertakes national clinical audit and research.

Chemotherapy - Drug therapy used to treat cancer. It may be used alone, or in conjunction with other types of treatment (e.g. surgery or radiotherapy).

Clinical nurse specialist (CNS) - A registered nurse with an advanced nursing role who provides specialist care and advice to patients in a certain medical speciality.

Colon - The longest part of the large bowel, which ends just above the rectum.

COVID-19 pandemic - A global outbreak of coronavirus disease caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). The COVID-19 pandemic led to widespread disruption of healthcare services across the NHS, including cancer diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up, significantly impacting cancer care pathways during 2020 and 2021.

Curative care - Treatment with the aim to cure a person of the disease. Curative treatment is not possible for some people with bowel cancer and is dependent on how far the disease has spread, and a person's general health and physical condition.

Disease-targeted treatment - Treatments that are given with the aim of killing or removing the cancerous tissue.

Diverting ileostomy (loop ileostomy) - A type of stoma in which part of the small bowel is brought to the surface of the abdomen to divert bowel contents. It is often formed temporarily to protect the join in the bowel after an anterior resection, although it is not always possible or appropriate to reverse it.

Emergency admission - An unplanned hospital admission that occurs urgently, usually via the emergency department or following referral by a GP or out-of-hours service.

Health Board - An organisational body responsible for planning and delivering NHS healthcare services within a defined geographical area in Wales. Health Boards oversee the provision of primary care, community services, and hospital care, including cancer services. They are accountable to the Welsh Government and work to ensure that healthcare services meet the needs of the local population.

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) - A database which contains data on all in-patients treated within NHS trusts in England. This includes details of admissions, diagnoses and treatments.

ICD-10 - International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems 10th Revision. A list of medical codes used to identify and categorise medical diagnoses.

Immunotherapy – Treatment that helps the immune system recognise and attack cancer cells. It is an important treatment option for some bowel cancers with particular molecular features, including mismatch repair deficiency.

Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) - a measure of relative deprivation in a particular small area (of ~1,500 residents or 650 households), used as a measure of deprivation in England and Wales.

Laparoscopic - also called minimally invasive or keyhole surgery, is a type of surgical procedure performed through small incisions (cuts) in the skin instead of one long incision (cut) used in open surgery.

Large bowel - Part of the digestive system made up of the colon and the rectum.

Local excision - Removal of a bowel cancer without major bowel resection. This may be performed endoscopically during a colonoscopy, or surgically through the anus. Surgical techniques include TransAnal Minimally Invasive Surgery (TAMIS) which is a specially designed local excision technique which allows surgery to be performed within the back passage (rectum) using a special instrument called a laparoscope (telescope). Local excision can also be performed endoscopically via a camera.

Lymph nodes - Small oval bits of tissue that form part of the immune system. They are distributed throughout the body and are usually the first place to which cancers spread.

Lynch Syndrome - An inherited genetic condition that can increase the lifetime risk of bowel cancer to up to 80% and can increase the risk of some other cancers including womb and ovarian. It is diagnosed using a blood test to look for a genetic defect.

Major resection – An operation to remove the part of the colon or rectum containing the cancer, usually together with surrounding tissue and lymph nodes.

Metastases - Deposits of cancer that occur when the cancer has spread from the place in which it started to other parts of the body. These are commonly called secondary cancers and are known as metastatic disease.

Microsatellite instability (MSI) – A feature found in some cancers caused by problems with DNA mismatch repair. MSI testing can help guide treatment and identify people who may require assessment for Lynch syndrome.

Mismatch repair (MMR) – A system within cells that repairs errors in DNA. Some bowel cancers have deficient mismatch repair (dMMR), which can influence treatment options and may indicate an increased likelihood of Lynch syndrome.

Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) - a group of professionals from diverse specialties that works to optimise diagnosis and treatment throughout the patient pathway.

The National Cancer Audit Collaborating Centre (NATCAN) - A national centre of excellence that has been commissioned to deliver ten national cancer audits by the Healthcare Quality Improvement Partnership (HQIP), on behalf of NHS England and the Welsh Government. NATCAN is part of the Clinical Effectiveness Unit (CEU) – a collaboration between the Royal College of Surgeons of England (RCSEng) and the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM).

National Disease Registration Service (NDRS) - A service that collects and analyses data on cancer and rare diseases in the UK, part of NHS England.

Neoadjuvant therapy - Disease-targeted treatment (such as chemotherapy or radiotherapy) given before another treatment, usually surgery. It may be given to shrink the cancer, reduce the risk of recurrence or improve the effectiveness of subsequent treatment.

NHS trust - An organisational unit within the National Health Service (NHS) in England responsible for delivering healthcare services. Each NHS trust operates with a degree of autonomy and is accountable for the quality, safety, and efficiency of the care it provides.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) - An independent organisation responsible for providing national guidance on the promotion of good health and the prevention and treatment of ill health.

Oncology - The branch of medicine concerned with the diagnosis and treatment of cancer. In this report, oncological treatments include treatments such as chemotherapy and radiotherapy.

Organ preservation – Treatment of rectal cancer that aims to avoid major surgical removal of the rectum while maintaining effective cancer control. Approaches may include local excision or non-operative management following neoadjuvant treatment in appropriately selected patients.

Palliative care (also called non-curative care) - Care aimed at improving quality of life and managing symptoms for people living with an illness that cannot be cured. It may be provided alongside treatments intended to control the cancer and prolong life.

Pathology - The branch of medicine that deals with tissue specimens under a microscope to determine the type of disease and how far a cancer has spread within the specimen (i.e. whether a tumour has spread to the edges of the specimen or lymph nodes).

Performance status - A classification system to describe a person's functional status in carrying out routine activities of daily living. Scores range from 0 (fully active with no restrictions) to 5 (dead).

Quality assurance - A process of monitoring and evaluation that helps to ensure that diagnostic and treatment services are consistently delivered to a high standard, and that variations in practice or outcomes are identified.

Quality improvement - An approach to enhancing the safety, effectiveness, and efficiency of healthcare services by identifying areas where care can be improved, testing and implementing changes, and measuring the impact over time.

Radiotherapy - A treatment that uses radiation to kill tumour cells and shrink the tumour.

Rapid Cancer Registration Data (RCRD) - Dataset that contains information about proxy tumour registrations and some associated events on the cancer patient pathway (e.g. surgery, radiotherapy and chemotherapy) from January 2018. This data set provides a quicker source of cancer data compared to the National Cancer Registration Data (NCRD). The RCRD is curated by the National Disease Registration Service (NDRS), as part of NHS England.

Rectum - Part of the large bowel that sits between the colon and the anus. Bowel motions (poo) are stored here before passing out of the anus.

Robotic-assisted surgery - this is a relatively new advancement in surgery and allows surgeons to control surgical instruments whilst sitting at a special console during the operation. This console is within the same operating room.

The Royal College of Surgeons of England (RCSEng) - An independent professional body committed to enabling surgeons to achieve and maintain the highest standards of surgical practice and patient care. As part of this it supports audit and the evaluation of clinical effectiveness for surgery.

Screening - the aim of screening is to try to detect cancers early. People aged 50-74 are invited to take part in bowel cancer screening every 2 years. They do this by providing a poo sample which is checked for blood (FIT).

Stage / TNM (Tumour / Nodal / Metastatic) stage - The extent to which the primary tumour has spread; the higher the stage, the more extensive the disease. TNM is an international classification system to describe the extent of a cancer using information on the tumour size, lymph node status, and the presence or absence of metastatic disease. Overall cancer stages range from 1 (localised disease) to 4 (advanced disease).

Staging - The process by which the stage (or extent of spread) of the tumour is determined, through the use of various investigations.

Stoma - a surgical opening in the abdominal skin where the bowel is brought out to the surface. Bowel contents are then collected within a stoma bag which attaches to surrounding skin with an adhesive dressing. Bags can readily be replaced. Colostomy (colon or large bowel) and ileostomy (ileum, part of the small bowel) are types of stoma. Stomas may be temporary, meaning that they can be reversed (bowel put back inside the abdomen), or permanent, meaning that they cannot be reversed.

Surgical resection - A medical treatment that involves surgically removing all, or part, of a tissue, structure or organ.

Systemic anti-cancer therapy / SACT - Medication given to treat cancer, such as chemotherapy or immunotherapy.

Total neoadjuvant therapy (TNT) – An approach to treating rectal cancer in which radiotherapy and chemotherapy are both given before surgery, or before a decision is made about whether surgery is required.

Toxicity - chemotherapy often has side effects which can make you unwell. This is called toxicity and can be of varying severity. It includes, for example, diarrhoea and vomiting. Severe acute toxicity is defined by requiring hospitalisation because of these side effects.