# Helen Wilson exposes NHS gaps in emotional and nutritional cancer care



Helen Wilson’s call for a transformation in the approach to cancer care reflects a deeply personal struggle that resonates with many patients across the UK. Wilson, a stage three bladder cancer survivor, is committed to raising awareness about the necessity of Holistic Needs Assessments (HNAs) in cancer treatment. Her advocacy comes in response to what she characterises as a system that often focuses singularly on the disease while neglecting the patient as a whole.

Diagnosed in 2024 at just 40 years old, Wilson's battle against cancer was marked by not only intense physical suffering but also a profound emotional toll. After enduring eight grueling months of chemotherapy and radiotherapy, the physical repercussions were substantial—Wilson lost over three stone, faced declining eyesight, and was thrust into early menopause. As she articulated, the devastating emotional impact was largely overlooked: “Not once was I properly asked how I was coping – really coping.” The implications of neglecting mental health in cancer care cannot be overstated, as psychological support is crucial in helping patients navigate their trauma and distress.

The Daily Express’s campaign to mandate HNAs aims to ensure that every cancer patient is equipped with the necessary mental health support during and after treatment. This initiative is aligned with broader health campaigns advocating for comprehensive care strategies that address not only the physical aspects of cancer but also its emotional and psychological consequences. Currently, while services exist, the application of HNAs within the NHS is inconsistent, leaving many patients, like Wilson, feeling isolated and unheard.

According to sources from Cancer Research UK and Macmillan Cancer Support, HNAs are designed to be simple questionnaires that cover a cancer patient's physical, emotional, and social wellbeing. They are integral to the Personalised Care and Support Planning (PCSP) programme, which is available throughout the UK. These assessments allow healthcare teams to develop tailored support plans that directly correspond to the diverse needs of individuals living with cancer. However, there appears to be a gap in implementing these protocols consistently across cancer care facilities, with varying degrees of availability and effectiveness reported from different NHS trusts.

The emotional burden of cancer treatment should not be disregarded; Wilson criticises the prevailing "toxic positivity" surrounding cancer, emphasising the pressure patients often feel to adopt a brave facade. Those fighting cancer require acknowledgment of their fear and pain as much as their physical ailments. This perspective is corroborated by organisations that highlight the significance of emotional support in recovery and quality of life post-treatment.

Moreover, Wilson's experience regarding nutritional advice during her treatments underscores another vital area for reform. She highlights the questionable dietary recommendations she received, which were misguided in their simplicity when faced with the complex realities of cancer metabolism and growth. Improved access to evidence-based nutritional guidance could mitigate some of the physical side effects of treatment and improve overall recovery outcomes.

As Helen Wilson champions these issues through the Daily Express’s Cancer Care campaign, her testimony exemplifies the urgency of comprehensive cancer care reform. By advocating for HNAs and a holistic approach to cancer treatment, she aims not only to change the system for herself but for all patients who find themselves battling similar challenges.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2063711/cancer-battle-nhs-change), [[4]](https://www.uclh.nhs.uk/our-services/find-service/cancer-services/londonsarcomaservice/sarcoma-patients/personalised-care/holistic-needs-assessment-care-plan)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2063711/cancer-battle-nhs-change), [[2]](https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/treatment/prehabilitation/living-well-after-cancer-treatment), [[5]](https://www.plymouthhospitals.nhs.uk/hna/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/healthcare-professionals/innovation-in-cancer-care/holistic-needs-assessment), [[6]](https://www.kgh.nhs.uk/holistic-needs-assessment-hna-care-planning/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2063711/cancer-battle-nhs-change), [[2]](https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/treatment/prehabilitation/living-well-after-cancer-treatment), [[3]](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/healthcare-professionals/innovation-in-cancer-care/holistic-needs-assessment)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2063711/cancer-battle-nhs-change), [[2]](https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/treatment/prehabilitation/living-well-after-cancer-treatment), [[5]](https://www.plymouthhospitals.nhs.uk/hna/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2063711/cancer-battle-nhs-change), [[6]](https://www.kgh.nhs.uk/holistic-needs-assessment-hna-care-planning/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2063711/cancer-battle-nhs-change> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/treatment/prehabilitation/living-well-after-cancer-treatment> - Cancer Research UK discusses the impact of cancer on various aspects of life and introduces the Personalised Care and Support Planning (PCSP) programme. This programme includes a Holistic Needs Assessment (HNA), which is a simple questionnaire covering physical, practical, emotional, spiritual, and social needs. The HNA aims to support individuals living with cancer by identifying their concerns and creating a care and support plan. The PCSP is available throughout England, with similar programmes in Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. Healthcare teams use this approach to provide comprehensive support to cancer patients.
3. <https://www.macmillan.org.uk/healthcare-professionals/innovation-in-cancer-care/holistic-needs-assessment> - Macmillan Cancer Support provides detailed information on Holistic Needs Assessments (HNAs), a key intervention in personalised care for cancer patients. An HNA is a simple questionnaire that helps identify a patient's concerns, leading to the development of a Personalised Care and Support Plan. The assessment includes a conversation to discuss the patient's needs, which may be physical, emotional, practical, financial, or spiritual. Macmillan also offers resources and support for healthcare professionals to implement HNAs effectively, including electronic versions and checklists in multiple languages.
4. <https://www.uclh.nhs.uk/our-services/find-service/cancer-services/londonsarcomaservice/sarcoma-patients/personalised-care/holistic-needs-assessment-care-plan> - University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust explains the process of Holistic Needs Assessments (HNAs) for cancer patients. The HNA is a simple questionnaire designed to support individuals living with cancer, helping to identify their greatest needs and concerns. It ensures that physical, practical, emotional, spiritual, and social needs are addressed appropriately. The assessment is usually completed electronically, but paper versions are available upon request. After completing the HNA, a discussion with a healthcare professional leads to the development of an individualised care and support plan.
5. <https://www.plymouthhospitals.nhs.uk/hna/> - University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust outlines the process of Holistic Needs Assessments (HNAs) for cancer patients. The HNA is undertaken at different stages in the cancer patient's pathway, particularly at diagnosis and following treatment. It involves gathering and discussing information to understand the patient's knowledge, understanding, and needs. The assessment focuses on the whole person, including physical, emotional, spiritual, mental, social, and environmental aspects. The results inform a personalised care and support plan, developed in partnership between the patient and Clinical Nurse Specialist.
6. <https://www.kgh.nhs.uk/holistic-needs-assessment-hna-care-planning/> - Kettering General Hospital NHS provides information on Holistic Needs Assessments (HNAs) and care planning for cancer patients. An HNA is offered at key points during treatment to discuss and assess any concerns or worries. It allows patients to consider all aspects of their well-being, including physical, emotional, and practical concerns, as well as the potential impact on family, friends, and lifestyle. A care plan is produced following discussions, outlining how the concerns raised will be addressed. Patients can request another HNA at any time during treatment if they have concerns or worries.
7. <https://www.bettercareleicester.nhs.uk/better-care-together-home/the-bct-plan/cancer/personalised-care-people-living-with-and-beyond-cancer/holistic-needs-assessments-and-personalised-care-plans/> - Better Care Leicester discusses Holistic Needs Assessments (HNAs) and Personalised Care Plans for cancer patients. An HNA is a simple questionnaire that allows individuals affected by cancer to highlight the most important issues at that time, informing the development of a care and support plan with their nurse or key worker. The questionnaire can be completed on paper or electronically. The HNA ensures that people's physical, practical, emotional, spiritual, and social needs are met in a timely and appropriate way, targeting resources to those who need them most.