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Ovarian cancer: How practice teams can support the campaign

naedi.org/beclearoncancer/ovarian

The NHS is piloting a local campaign to raise awareness of persistent bloating as a symptom of ovarian cancer. Being prepared is vital.

What is Be Clear on Cancer?

Be Clear on Cancer aims to improve early diagnosis of cancer by raising awareness of symptoms and encouraging people to see their GP earlier.

The Department of Health prioritises cancer types based on the number of deaths that could be avoided if survival rates matched the best in Europe. It then reviews the latest evidence and engages with experts to develop key messages for the campaigns, testing them locally and regionally, before they are rolled out nationally.

What is the campaign's key message?

The message for women is: **Feeling bloated, most days, for three weeks or more could be a sign of ovarian cancer.**

Who is it aimed at?

All women over 50, the age group most at risk of developing ovarian cancer, and their friends and family.

Why focus on persistent 'bloating'?

Focusing on just one key symptom keeps the message simple and direct. The Department of Health consulted with experts and clinicians who felt that, of the symptoms highlighted in the recent [NICE guidelines](#), persistent abdominal distension (women often refer to this as 'bloating') was the key possible sign of ovarian cancer.

Why does the campaign say 'most days, for three weeks or more'?

When tested with the target audience, women felt the campaign needed to explain what was meant by 'persistent'.

They asked for clarity – to know how long they should wait before going to see their GP.

What's happening in your local area and when?

Local NHS teams are working with the Department of Health to develop a range of activities aimed at reaching women in your [communities](#). Individual activities vary across each of the local pilots, but will include media such as local press and radio in some areas and community-based outreach work in others. These will be taking place from 14 January to mid-March 2013.

How can you order campaign materials?

You can order free posters and leaflets from the Department of Health via www.orderline.dh.gov.uk or by ringing 0300 123 1002.

Why does the campaign need your support?

Recent estimates suggest that around 500 deaths from ovarian cancer could be avoided each year if survival rates matched the best in Europe.

That's why we need to encourage women who have persistent bloating to recognise that they should visit their GP without delay. To make this campaign a success, we need you and your colleagues to be aware of it and to talk about it with patients.

'Bloating was the main symptom for me but I put it down to getting older. I pointed it out to my sister and she urged me to see a GP. My advice to anyone with persistent bloating is to take yourself straight to the doctor.'

Lou Pescod, aged 65, cancer survivor and supporter of Ovarian Cancer Action

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More about ovarian cancer

- **Around 5,800 women are diagnosed with ovarian cancer in England each year – around 4,750 of whom (more than 80%) are aged 50 and over**
- **More than 3,350 women aged 50 and over die from ovarian cancer in England every year**
- **Over 90% of all women diagnosed with the earliest stage ovarian cancer (stage I) survive for at least five years. This figure is 5% for women diagnosed with the most advanced stage disease (stage IV)**

‘Our practice was part of a local Be Clear on Cancer campaign. More people came through our doors, not a huge amount, but because we’d planned well it was manageable. It’s important to brief the whole practice on the campaign, including clinical colleagues, nurses and receptionists. Be prepared for an increase in demand for appointments, and calls regarding test results. I think it is important to realise that awareness can be raised by opportunistically talking to women in the target age group about the campaign when they attend surgery for any reason.’ Jenny Powell, Practice Manager, Berkshire

Reminders

You might find it helpful to keep these reminders about ovarian cancer symptoms easily accessible throughout the Be Clear on Cancer campaign.

Ovarian cancer symptoms

The public-facing information highlights having any of the following symptoms, ‘most days, for three weeks or more’:

- Unexplained bloating
- Feeling full quickly or loss of appetite
- Pelvic or stomach pain
- Needing to pee urgently or more frequently than normal

What to expect during the campaign

The Department of Health is initially launching the ovarian cancer campaign at a local level so that it can assess the extent of its impact on primary and secondary care on a relatively small scale.

Previous Be Clear on Cancer campaigns have shown that your practice is unlikely to be overwhelmed. But you may see more women coming to your practice with the symptom of persistent bloating as a result of local activities, possibly a few weeks into the campaign.

Analysis following the national Be Clear on Cancer bowel campaign, which ran from January to March 2012, showed an increase of one patient with relevant symptoms per practice every two weeks. That was a national campaign, which focused on a more common cancer and included TV advertising.

What impact will the campaign have on your practice?

Recent NICE guidelines recommend that women with symptoms of ovarian cancer have diagnostic tests and/or be urgently referred if appropriate. Prepare for more

assessments and referrals and, as a result, more women ringing up asking for test results.

The campaign may prompt women to discuss symptoms with your practice nurse as part of other appointments or clinics. So, as well as GPs, nurses need to be aware of the key messages.

Three things you can do to help

1 Brief colleagues. The whole practice team needs to be aware of this campaign, so they can support it. It’s important practice nurses are briefed on the key messages and there’s a separate [briefing sheet for GPs](#). Research shows that one of the reasons people don’t see their doctor, even though they have symptoms, is the challenge of booking an appointment. It’s vital receptionists are prepared for women who have the symptom of persistent bloating wanting appointments. But, they need to be mindful that women may feel that they’re wasting the GP’s time.

2 Expect and plan for the campaign. Save this briefing sheet, and the one for GPs, and make sure your team knows they’re available. Encourage everyone to look at the campaign web pages and have a look through the campaign leaflet on [NHS Choices](#). Be prepared for an increase in the number of women sent for diagnostic tests and referred via the urgent two-week wait referral system.

3 Advertise. Display posters and leaflets and encourage colleagues to talk about the campaign. It is often face-to-face discussion that changes behaviour. Talking might prompt someone to make an appointment or open up about their symptoms.

Find out more

- **Information and resources for practice teams are available at:** www.naedi.org/beclearoncancer/ovarian
- **From January, the public-facing website for Be Clear on Cancer is** www.nhs.uk/persistentbloating