



# Be Clear on Cancer – information for practice teams

**From January 2012, breast cancer awareness and early diagnosis will be making the news in seven areas across England. A local *Be Clear on Cancer* campaign is likely to bring more people through your practice doors. Being prepared is vital – it'll make it easier for you to do your job effectively, and it'll help save lives.**

**We need your help to ensure that this campaign is successful.**

## **WHAT** is the campaign?

*Be Clear on Cancer* is a Department of Health campaign which aims to improve the public's awareness of the key symptoms of certain cancers and to encourage people with those symptoms to see their doctor early. A local PCT-led pilot focusing on breast cancer in women over the age of 70 is taking place in your area between January and March 2012.

The key message for the public is **"1 in 3 women who get breast cancer are over 70, so don't assume you're past it"**. In qualitative research, this message proved to be extremely powerful with women in the target group.

Local advertisements will highlight that older women are more at risk of breast cancer, therefore anything unusual like a lump, a change to nipples, skin or shape of their breasts could be an early sign of breast cancer and to tell the doctor straight away.

## **WHY** focus on breast cancer in women over 70?

More than 39,000 women are diagnosed with breast cancer each year making it England's most common cancer. One third of all breast cancer cases are diagnosed in women over 70. However, we know that women over 70 are more likely to delay seeing their doctor for unusual breast symptoms. As a result, breast cancer is often diagnosed at a later stage in this age group. Diagnosing breast cancer early means treatments can be less aggressive and are more likely to be successful.

## **HOW** will the campaign improve detection and survival rates?

Even though more women are surviving breast cancer than ever before thanks to better awareness, screening and treatments, survival rates in England still lag behind those in some other European countries.

Intervention, mortality and survival rates for women over 70 with breast cancer are poor compared with those in other countries. Delayed diagnosis and therefore advanced stage at diagnosis may be major factors in determining survival. Since women over 70 are less likely to be breast aware and more likely to delay seeking help for unusual breast symptoms, breast cancer is often diagnosed at a later stage in this age group. Encouraging breast awareness and emphasising the importance of early presentation should therefore help to drive early diagnosis in this group.

## Key Facts:

- **Breast cancer is the most common cancer in England**
- **More than 39,000 women are diagnosed with breast cancer every year in England**
- **One third of all breast cancer cases are diagnosed in women over 70**
- **Women over 70 are more likely to delay seeing their doctor for unusual breast symptoms**

This is not the first *Be Clear on Cancer* campaign.

Two regional pilots for bowel cancer using the *Be Clear on Cancer* brand ran in the early part of 2011 in the South West and East of England. Results from the bowel cancer pilot were that:

- there was a 48% increase in the number of people aged over 50 who visited their GP with symptoms – this equated to one additional patient per practice per week
- there was a 32% increase in urgent referrals to hospitals over six months
- 75% of the public in these areas said they had seen the advertising for the campaign

Following the bowel cancer pilot, another pilot campaign ran in the Midlands for five weeks in October and November 2011, this time focusing on lung cancer. The lessons from the bowel cancer pilot, as well as other campaigns running under the overarching *Be Clear on Cancer* banner, have helped to inform the campaigns focusing on breast cancer in women aged over 70, or 73 in some areas.

### Referring older women

Please don't worry that secondary care services will be overwhelmed with referrals. While we don't know exactly how many women will respond to the campaign in your area, we are expecting to see an increase in referrals. The PCT leading on the campaign will be helping colleagues in secondary care to understand and plan for this increase.

### Breast screening in women over 70

Many older women do not believe they are still at risk of breast cancer and this is probably partly due to routine breast screening invitations stopping at age 70.

Women over 70 are still entitled to free NHS breast screening. The NHS Breast Screening Programmes do not send invitations to women over 70, but they do still encourage women to make their own appointments via the local screening service. It is important to highlight to your patients that the risk of breast cancer continues to increase after the age of 70 and that they are still entitled to attend routine breast screening. This can be done by advertising screening in your waiting rooms, or practice nurses can remind patients, if appropriate, when they come in for routine appointments.

## What you can do

**Brief your colleagues.** The campaign may prompt women who have previously ignored their symptoms to come to your surgery. However, they may be afraid and worry that they are wasting the GP's time. Your GPs and practice staff need to be aware of the campaign and why it's running. There's a separate factsheet for GPs but it's vital that all members of the practice team are aware of the campaign. For example, it's important that receptionists know that they may get more patients ringing up with breast symptoms.

### Expect and plan for an increase in numbers.

The previous bowel cancer campaign resulted in one additional patient per practice per week, suggesting that the additional attendances to primary care were manageable. While we don't know exactly how many women will respond to the campaign in your area, we are expecting to see a significant increase in referrals. The PCT leading on this campaign will be helping colleagues in secondary care to understand and plan for this increase.

**Promote your local campaign.** Display posters and leaflets and encourage your colleagues to talk about the campaign. This might prompt someone to make an appointment or open up about their symptoms.

## Further information

A team of organisations is working together to coordinate this activity, including the Department of Health, the National Cancer Action Team and local Cancer Networks. If you have a query or would like further information contact [naedi@cancer.org.uk](mailto:naedi@cancer.org.uk)

Further information for primary care professionals is available at [breakthrough.org.uk/beclearoncancer](http://breakthrough.org.uk/beclearoncancer)