



Joy Sowerby, diagnosed with stomach cancer

Oesophago-gastric cancers: campaign information for pharmacy teams

26 January – 22 February 2015

Last updated: 23 January 2015

Public Health England will be launching a national campaign aimed at raising awareness of the key symptoms of oesophago-gastric cancers. We need the continued support of local pharmacists and their teams – you have a vital role to play in making it a success.

What is Be Clear on Cancer?

Be Clear on Cancer aims to improve early diagnosis of cancer by raising awareness of the signs and symptoms, and encouraging people to see their doctor without delay.

What are oesophago-gastric cancers?

The term 'oesophago-gastric' (OG) refers to cancers of the oesophagus (commonly known as the gullet or food pipe) and stomach.

Why focus on this type of cancer?

Evidence shows that patients may delay in presenting to their GP with symptoms of OG cancers. It has been estimated that around 950 deaths from OG cancers could be avoided each year in England if survival rates matched the best in Europe.

What is the main message of the campaign?

The key message, promoted on TV, will be: 'Having heartburn, most days, for 3 weeks or more could be a sign of cancer – tell your doctor.' **A second message**, promoted via other campaign materials, will be: 'Food sticking when you swallow could be a sign of cancer – tell your doctor.'

Has this campaign run before?

This is the first national campaign for OG cancers; there have been pilots at a local and regional level. The evaluation of local pilots (April–July 2012) and a regional pilot, which ran in the Northern England Strategic Clinical Network (SCN) region (Feb–Mar 2014), have been encouraging.

Why focus on the symptoms of heartburn and food sticking?

There was a review of campaign results to date, some of the published literature and the advice of a panel of experts, including clinicians and patient group representatives, to agree which symptoms to focus on. Two symptoms, heartburn (dyspepsia) and food sticking (dysphagia) were identified as the most appropriate symptoms for this advertising campaign. The link between heartburn and oesophageal adenocarcinoma (OAC) has long been recognised and is thought to be one of the earlier signs of these types of cancer. To make TV advertising as effective as possible, only one message, heartburn, will be communicated in the advert. Both symptoms will feature in radio and print adverts.

How can pharmacy teams support this national campaign?

Your role in this campaign is a significant one. Heartburn is a common symptom, one that people often come to the pharmacy with, either for advice or for purchasing over the counter medicines (OTC) to control their symptoms. The chances are it won't be cancer, but if someone has been managing their heartburn for 3 weeks or more, and if symptoms persist or change despite using the appropriate medicines, you should advise them to visit their GP. Asking someone who is purchasing medicines for dyspepsia about the duration of their symptoms could make the difference.

"I had a history of heartburn and was on a repeat prescription for it. In hindsight, I hadn't really noticed that it had changed – I had just learnt to live with it. But, in early 2014, my husband heard the Be Clear on Cancer advert on the radio. He insisted that I go to the GP. I am so grateful that he did, because my cancer was diagnosed before it had spread."

Joy Sowerby, aged 51, diagnosed with stomach cancer

- **The UK has the highest incidence rate of oesophageal cancer (adenocarcinoma) among men in the world**
- **Every day, around 28 people die from oesophago-gastric cancers in England¹**

Where will activities take place and when?

The campaign will run from 26 January to 22 February 2015 and will include TV, radio and newspaper advertising. In addition, because people often self medicate and manage their heartburn, there will also be advertising in some pharmacy settings.

Who is the campaign aimed at?

Men and women over the age of 50 from lower socioeconomic groups, and their key influencers, such as friends and family.

Who is most at risk from oesophageal and stomach cancers?

OG cancers affect both men and women, but are more common in men. They are also more common in older age, with more than 95% of oesophago-gastric cancers diagnosed in people aged 50 or over in England. But no matter what people's age and gender, healthy lifestyle changes can really help reduce the risk of these types of cancer. Behaviour-led risk factors include smoking, low consumption of fruit and vegetables, being overweight or obese and consuming alcohol on a regular basis. Visit Change 4 Life for more information on alcohol consumption and healthier food options.

OAC incidence rates have increased in recent years. These trends may be associated with an increase in some of the lifestyle behaviours listed above.

What other symptoms does the campaign highlight?

The campaign leaflet for the public highlights the following symptoms of OG cancers:

- Heartburn/indigestion on and off for 3 weeks or more
- Food feels like it's sticking in the throat upon swallowing
- Losing weight for no obvious reason
- Trapped wind and frequent burping
- Feeling full very quickly when eating
- Feeling bloated after eating
- Nausea or vomiting
- Stomach pain in the upper tummy area.

Is there any evidence this campaign will work?

Results from the regional pilot campaign, (Feb–Mar 2014) have been promising. Research showed:

- A significant increase of 32 percentage points, from pre- to post-campaign in spontaneous awareness of oesophago-gastric cancer symptoms (ie heartburn, indigestion and food sticking)^{2,3}
- 63% of those surveyed agreed the advertising had told them something new.²

More results from the local and regional pilots and feedback from those involved in the pilot can be viewed at www.naedi.org/beclearoncancer/oesophago-gastric

1 Deaths data supplied by West Midlands KIT based on ONS data
 2 TNS BMRB on behalf of Public Health England, post-OG campaign survey of 300 adults aged over 50 interviewed face-to-face in the North East region, 12–25 March 2014
 3 Based on all who have seen any publicity recently about the symptoms of cancer

Three things pharmacy teams can do:

1 Make it part of your day. Familiarise yourself with the TV advert and be mindful that you may be asked about the campaign by your customers/patients. Where relevant, bring the campaign into conversation such as during medicine use reviews, when advising people with relevant symptoms or selling over the counter medicines. Find phrases that you are comfortable with and practice using them, such as “Do you think it might be a good idea to discuss your symptoms with your GP?”. Pharmacy staff who feel uncomfortable talking about cancer should seek the advice of their pharmacist.

2 Build confidence. We know our target audience may delay in going to see their GP and often seek permission to make an appointment. Where relevant, encourage customers/patients to visit their GP. If you feel comfortable, tell the customer to mention that their pharmacist sent them. It may be the push they need to get themselves checked out. Further information about why people might delay seeing a GP, and how you can help them to feel more confident in making an appointment, is available at Cancer Research UK.

3 Promote the campaign. Talk to your friends, family, customers, patients and colleagues about Be Clear on Cancer. By talking about the campaign, you will help people to feel more comfortable about sharing details of a sign or symptom of cancer that they might be experiencing. Put up posters in your pharmacy and have some leaflets readily available for customers.

Useful resources and tools:

- **Order free posters and leaflets: visit the [Health and Social Care Publications Orderline](#) or call 0300 123 1002**
- **View the TV advert on [NHS Choices](#)**
- **Hear what colleagues in the [pilot area](#) thought of the OG campaign**
- **E-learning: Test your knowledge with the [British Oncology Pharmacy Association's interactive e-learning modules on oesophago-gastric cancers](#)**
- **Learn more about initiating conversations about cancer via [Cancer Research UK's Talk Cancer training](#)**

“Pharmacists have an important role to play in supporting this national Be Clear on Cancer campaign. It is likely to prompt people who have previously ignored their symptoms, or who have been managing their heartburn themselves, to come into the pharmacy and ask for advice. The chances are it's nothing serious, but persistent heartburn needs to be addressed and if it is cancer, the earlier it is diagnosed, the easier it is to treat.”

Steve Williamson, Consultant Cancer Pharmacist at Northumbria NHS Trust & NHS England