Bowel cancer campaign gets celebrity backing

Tuesday 28 August, 2012

One in three people are embarrassed to talk to their doctor about poo even though having blood in poo is a key symptom of bowel cancer which can kill. Knowing the symptoms of bowel cancer and seeing a doctor early on can save lives according to the national bowel cancer campaign supported by TV personality Sharon Osbourne.

The ‘Be Clear on Cancer’ bowel cancer campaign encourages people who have had blood in their poo or looser poo for three weeks or more to see their doctor. The adverts aim to make people aware of the symptoms of bowel cancer and make it easier for them to discuss this with their GP.

Care Services Minister Paul Burstow said:

“No one likes thinking about cancer, or talking about their poo. But the plain fact is no one dies of embarrassment, they can die of cancer if they don’t get an early diagnosis. If you show any of the key symptoms, tell your GP. It could save your life.”

“Early diagnosis makes a huge difference to your chance of survival. Thats why we are building on the success of our recent national campaign which led to more people getting checked out by their GP.”

Sharon Osbourne, who had bowel cancer and is backing the campaign said:

“For goodness’ sake…we’ve all got a bum and we all poo, so get over it! The sooner bowel cancer is caught, the more likely the chance of survival. That is why everyone needs to just look out for the symptoms and head straight to the doctor if you are worried about anything. Early detection could save your life!”

Other findings from the Department of Health survey conducted by TNS which questioned 1052 people showed:

74 per cent of people are unaware that as much as one third of the population inEnglandwill get cancer in a lifetime;
Only 15 per cent of people are aware that 34,000 people get bowel cancer each year inEngland

Bowel cancer isEngland’s third most common cancer and causes 13,200 deaths a year. The majority of people diagnosed with the disease are over the age of 55. However, bowel cancer is more treatable if spotted and diagnosed early. Over 93 per cent of people diagnosed with bowel cancer at an early stage survive for at least five years compared with less than 7% of those diagnosed at a late stage. IfEngland’s bowel cancer survival rates matched the best inEuropean additional 1,700 lives could be saved every year.

Dr Harpal Kumar, Cancer ResearchUK’s chief executive, said:

“Detecting bowel tumours early, before they’ve had a chance to spread, can significantly stack the odds in the patient’s favour. If people respond to this campaign – and take up bowel screening when invited to do so – we have a chance of pushing bowel cancer well down the league table of killers. We urge people to overcome their fear. For most, any symptoms will turn out to be nothing to worry about. But for those people with cancer, the earlier they go to their doctor, the more likely they are to survive.”

Deborah Alsina, CEO, Bowel CancerUKand Mark Flannagan, CEO, Beating Bowel Cancer said:

“We are delighted the Government will again be running their Be Clear on Cancer bowel campaign. Awareness of the disease remains stubbornly low and too many people are leaving it too late to visit their GPs when they have signs of cancer. As a result, bowel cancer remains the second biggest cancer killer with thousands of avoidable deaths each year so it is essential that we keep reminding people of the key messages about symptoms and the importance of going to your GP if you have any concerns.

Bowel cancer is very treatable, especially if diagnosed early, so we need to ensure that these potentially life-saving messages are both heard, understood and acted upon. ”

The ‘Be Clear on Cancer’ campaign was piloted in the South West and East of England in January 2011. In those areas, GPs saw the number of people over the age of 50 presenting with the relevant

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symptoms increase by 48 per cent – about one extra patient per practice per week. Early analysis of the national campaign this year showed that there has already been a 30 per cent increase in patients over 50 reporting key campaign-related symptoms across 340 GP practices.

The adverts will appear on TV and radio inEnglandfor five weeks from today (Tuesday 28 August) until the end of September and over 100 face-to-face events will take place around the country.

Notes to editors

1. For further information please contact the Department of Health on 0207 2105436

2. Figures on increase on numbers of patients visiting GPs came from an interim analysis of the national campaign launched in January to March 2012. A full report is expected at the end of September.

3. Results from the pilots came from evaluation of the Bowel Cancer Awareness Pilot

4. The Department of Health conducted a survey with TNS from the 16th August 2012 – 20th August 2012. The survey was conducted online amongst adults inEngland. 1052 people were surveyed, and results were weighted to be nationally representative.

5. Questions from the survey:

On a scale of very embarrassed to not embarrassed at all, how do you feel about speaking to your GP about poo?

What proportion of people inEngland do you think get cancer in a lifetime?

How many people in England get bowel cancer a year?

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