National Institute for Health and Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recommends scans for assessing liver damage in primary care, potentially saving countless lives

Wednesday 7 June, 2023

The British Liver Trust welcomes today's decision by NICE today to recommend the use of FibroScan, a non-invasive liver scan, as an option for assessing liver damage in primary care. The charity believes this decision is a major step forward in the early detection and treatment of liver disease.

Liver disease is a serious and growing public health concern in the UK. The number of people dying from the disease has increased by 63.6% in the last twenty years. Alarmingly, cirrhosis, the most advanced form of liver disease, was one of the leading causes of excess deaths in 2022.

A major reason for these deaths is late diagnosis. Liver disease usually has no symptoms in the early stages and at the moment three quarters of people are diagnosed with cirrhosis at a late stage when it is too late for intervention of treatment. FibroScan offers a quick and non-invasive way to measure inflammation in the livers of those at risk. If routinely used in primary care, more people with liver damage will access treatment and intervention at the earliest opportunity before it progresses to a more serious form of liver disease. If liver disease is diagnosed early, lifestyle changes can halt or sometimes reverse the disease.

Pamela Healy, Chief Executive at the British Liver Trust, said: "The British Liver Trust have been campaigning for steps to be taken by the government to improve early diagnosis of liver disease. We are delighted that NICE recognises the importance of liver scanning in primary and community care. Having this service available in the community will reduce the need for unnecessary ultrasounds in hospital and mean that patients can access a scan without long journeys to hospital. This decision has the potential to save many lives, and we look forward to working with healthcare professional and policy makers to ensure that this vital diagnostic tool is available to all those who need it."

Up to one in three adults in the UK are at risk of liver disease.

Helen Jarvis, a GP working in the northeast of England and Medical Advisor to the British Liver Trust said, "Nine in 10 cases of liver disease are preventable with the main causes being alcohol, obesity and viral hepatitis yet late diagnosis of liver disease is unfortunately all too common and can have serious consequences for patients. It's important that we find people with liver disease early to save lives and improve outcomes.

"Making FibroScans available to assess people at risk as part of routine clinical care nationally – in GP surgeries and community health settings – is a great step in the right direction."

The news is being announced the day before International NASH day which aims to raise awareness of the most severe form of non-alcohol related fatty liver disease which is thought to affect one in six adults. The key risk factors for NASH include being overweight and having Type 2 diabetes.

To find out if you are at risk of liver disease you can take the British Liver Trust's free online quiz www.britishlivertrust.org.uk/screener

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