



Linda O'Donnell, cancer survivor

# How pharmacy teams can continue to support the national bowel cancer campaign

## We need your help to raise awareness of early diagnosis of cancer.

### What is Be Clear on Cancer?

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

The Department of Health reviews the latest evidence and engages with experts to establish which tumour types to focus on. It tests campaigns locally and regionally, before they are rolled out more widely. Be Clear on Cancer has promoted bowel and lung cancer at a national level. It has also been used in local and regional pilots to raise awareness of other cancers, including breast, bladder and kidney cancers.

### Why is this campaign focusing on bowel cancer?

Bowel cancer is one of the biggest cancer killers. Over 93% of bowel cancer patients diagnosed with the earliest stage of the disease survive for five years compared with less than 7% of those diagnosed with advanced disease.

### What is the main message of the campaign?

The campaign has a clear message: **tell your doctor if you've had blood in your poo or looser poo for three weeks or more.**

### What activities will be taking place and when?

A 'reminder' campaign will run from 28 August until the end of September. The adverts will appear on TV and radio, but there will be less than during the previous national campaign. Three areas of England will also pilot different approaches to keep the campaign running until mid-March 2013.

Earlier diagnosis of cancer will not be achieved overnight – it's important to keep running these campaigns to maintain

the public's awareness of the key symptoms. Initial findings from the first national campaign include an increase in:

- the public's unprompted awareness of blood in poo (27% to 42%) and looser poo (10% to 23%) as symptoms of bowel cancer;
- urgent referrals to hospitals compared to the same period in the previous year – more than 85% of the referrals were in people aged over 50.

### Who is the campaign aimed at?

Men and women from lower socioeconomic groups over the age of 55, and the people who influence them, such as friends and family.

### Why do you need to know about the campaign if the advertising prompts the public to see their GP?

You have a vital role to play. People delay going to see their GP for a variety of reasons. They might be embarrassed, not realise their symptoms are serious or worry about wasting their GP's time.

Pharmacies are often the first port of call for people suffering symptoms, for advice or to buy an over the counter (OTC) medicine. Many find it easier to discuss their symptoms or worries in the pharmacy setting. You'll be aware of customers who have repeatedly purchased OTC medicines connected to the key symptoms of blood in poo or looser poo. If these symptoms have lasted for three weeks or more, this is an ideal opportunity to suggest a visit to their GP.

**'I never thought it could happen to me. My symptoms included loose poo, occasional bleeding and some lower abdominal pain.'**

Linda O'Donnell, aged 60, cancer survivor

Supported by

## More about bowel cancer

- **Around 34,000 people are diagnosed with bowel cancer in England every year, 30,000 of whom are 55 and over**
- **Around 1,700 deaths could be avoided each year if bowel cancer survival rates were as good as the best in Europe**

**‘The ‘reminder’ campaign is another great opportunity for pharmacists and teams to support our communities. We can help our customers and patients to overcome some of the barriers to presenting early with suspected cancer symptoms. As pharmacists and pharmacy staff, we can provide reassurance, signpost our customers and patients to their GPs and keep a look out for those most at risk.’**

Ann Gunning, MRPharmS

### Who is most at risk of bowel cancer?

Bowel cancer affects both men and women but is more common in older age, with around 90% of people diagnosed aged over 55. Risk factors include: diet (eating too much red or processed meat and too little fruit and vegetables), being overweight or obese, low levels of physical activity, drinking alcohol and smoking. Those with a family history of bowel cancer are also more at risk.

### Opening cancer conversations with customers can be difficult. Do you have any tips?

A Cancer Research UK nurse, who specialises in communicating about cancer, advises:

‘It is important for pharmacists to feel confident and to try and make cancer a normal part of conversation. Practise and find phrases that you are comfortable with. For example if you wanted to mention cancer as part of a medicine-use review, talking about it in the same breath as heart disease, stroke and diabetes may make it easier. If you are worried about someone who has repeatedly bought OTC medicine for a suspected cancer symptom, you could ask: “What does the doctor say about that?” or “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 a pharmacist. If you need any further support, try contacting your [local Cancer Network](#).

### How are GPs and hospitals preparing for the campaign?

Cancer Networks are working with local providers to prepare for any increases in demand. There are [additional resources](#) available for GPs and on-going work to help hospital providers plan for expected [increases in referrals](#).

### Three things you can do:

**1 Make it part of your day.** During your regular consultations, such as medicine-use reviews, or in conversations with customers, be aware that people might want to talk about the campaign. It may prompt those who have previously ignored their symptoms to do something – they may come to your pharmacy looking for OTC medicine or advice.

**2 Give permission.** Our target audience delay going to see their GP and are often looking for reassurance to make an appointment. Where relevant, encourage customers 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.

**3 Promote the campaign.** Put up posters in your pharmacy and have campaign leaflets available for customers. You can order these free of charge at [www.orderline.dh.gov.uk](http://www.orderline.dh.gov.uk). Chat to your friends, family, customers and colleagues about Be Clear on Cancer. We need to talk about cancer and make it a less taboo topic.

### Find out more

- **Visit the [website for health professionals to find out more about Be Clear on Cancer](#)**
- **Test your knowledge with the bespoke interactive modules on bowel cancer at the [British Oncology Pharmacy Association’s learning centre](#)**
- **Direct members of the public interested in finding out more about the campaign or bowel cancer to [www.nhs.uk/bowelcancer](http://www.nhs.uk/bowelcancer)**
- **Visit [www.bowelcanceruk.org.uk](http://www.bowelcanceruk.org.uk) for further information about bowel cancer**

