**BACKGROUND**

Community pharmacies are ideally placed to play a role in early diagnosis of cancer due to their accessibility, opening hours and familiarity with the local population. But if pharmacy staff don’t feel they have the skills or knowledge to talk about cancer, or harbour negative beliefs themselves, then there is a missed opportunity to encourage conversations about the importance of spotting cancer early.

And we know community pharmacists want to do more; 74% said they could take a more active role to encourage people to spot and/or respond to potential signs and symptoms of cancer, but only 54% feel they have the skills or knowledge to do this.

Talk Cancer aims to address this by training community-based health workers such as pharmacy teams, to have simple but effective conversations about cancer as part of their day-to-day roles.

**METHODS**

Pre and post workshop surveys were completed by pharmacists and pharmacy staff on the day of workshops taking place between 2012 and 2016 (n=401), and analysed using Pearson’s chi-squared and two-sample t-test methods.

14 semi-structured qualitative telephone interviews were also conducted with pharmacy trainees around three months after attending a workshop (workshops delivered in November 2015 and March 2016), and analysed using Framework Analysis.

**KEY FINDINGS**

A training need for pharmacy teams was identified; 59% of Talk Cancer trainees reported having had no previous training about cancer prevention and/or the importance of spotting cancer early.

Immediately after the workshop, there was a significant increase in trainees’ confidence to discuss cancer in general (37% to 98%) and the NHS Cancer Screening Programmes (41% to 80%) p<0.001.

Awareness of a number of cancer risk factors also significantly increased: lack of physical activity (+46.6%), older age (+33.9%), being an unhealthy weight (+25.6%), not eating enough fruits and vegetables (+23%), eating too much red and processed meats (+21.1%) and drinking alcohol (+14.4%).

Surveys also suggest that trainees’ attitudes and beliefs about cancer became more positive as a result of training. For example, the number of trainees agreeing with the statement ‘I would find it hard to talk to someone about cancer’ decreased from 47% to 6% (p<0.001).

During qualitative telephone interviews trainees discussed how, prior to the workshop, they had not considered themselves to have a role to play in raising cancer awareness. After the workshops, most participants spoke of feeling more comfortable and confident, and more able and motivated to play a cancer awareness raising role.

"Before, I never used to raise the subject. After I’ve been to that [Talk Cancer] workshop now I’m quite confident to talk to people about cancer because they told us that how you approach people, how you disseminate the message..."

Many identified examples of cancer-related conversations they’d had as a direct result of Talk Cancer training - one of which led to a customer getting an early diagnosis of lung cancer after being encouraged to visit the GP by a pharmacist who attended Talk Cancer. Several had also organised cancer awareness displays in their pharmacies. Looking forward, many were particularly interested in running bowel cancer screening awareness campaigns, based on what they learnt.

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