CANCER AWARENESS TRAINING FOR PRACTICE STAFF

Cancer Research UK’s Talk Cancer training workshops equip and empower trainees with the knowledge, confidence and skills to have conversations about cancer awareness with people in their community.

[www.cruk.org/talkcancer](http://www.cruk.org/talkcancer)

We have developed a bespoke workshop for staff working in GP practices including Practice Nurses, reception staff, Medical Secretaries, administration staff, Practice Managers and Health Care Assistants.

- We have been delivering training to practice staff since 2012, and last year alone (2014-15) we trained over 300 Practice Nurses, HCAs, reception and admin staff, and Practice Managers.

- Our evaluation has found that Talk Cancer is filling a training gap for practice staff - 66% of practice staff who have attended Talk Cancer reported having no previous cancer awareness training.

- We saw increases in trainees’ awareness of various cancer risk factors, in particular lifestyle-related risk factors.

- The proportion of trainees feeling confident to discuss cancer increased from 37% to 97%.

- Beliefs about cancer became more positive. The number of trainees agreeing with the following statements decreased
  - ‘I would try to avoid talking to someone about cancer’ (15% to 6%)
  - ‘I would find it hard to talk to someone about cancer’ (30% to 13%)

- 93% of trainees agreed that Talk Cancer was relevant to their role.

Why should practice staff attend Talk Cancer?

With more than 4 in 10 cancers in the UK being linked to lifestyle and environmental risks\(^3\), this presents an opportunity to prevent many more cases of cancer. But, to do this, we need to help people be aware of how they can reduce their risk of cancer, and encourage them to make healthy lifestyle choices.

And, for the most part, patients who are diagnosed at an early stage are more likely to survive than those diagnosed at a later stage\(^2\). Yet we know many people avoid going to the doctor’s with symptoms for a variety of reasons including feeling embarrassed, worrying about wasting the doctor’s time, and worrying about what the doctor might find\(^3\).
Having a conversation and encouraging someone to visit their GP promptly with any concerns can make all the difference.

During our training, we often hear about the ‘door-handle’ diagnosis – the patient who only brings up a symptom which is concerning them as they are turning to leave a consultation, or in casual conversation with the receptionist on their way home.

Practice staff are ideally placed to help people to be aware of how they can reduce their risk of cancer, ensure they feel comfortable and confident to talk to their GP when appropriate, and promote the uptake of NHS Cancer Screening Programmes.

From the patient calling the surgery to book an appointment, to the patient popping in for their pre-holiday vaccinations, there are many opportunities to make every contact count, and all practice staff can play a key role. It’s not about being cancer experts – it’s about having simple, yet impactful conversations, and knowing how and where to signpost.

**How can Talk Cancer help?**

We launched Talk Cancer in 2012, following a series of successful pilot workshops in the Midlands. Since then, we have been commissioned to train over 2,000 people such as practice staff, pharmacists, health trainers, nurses and community-based volunteers.

Our evaluation has found that Talk Cancer is filling a training gap for practice staff - 66% of practice staff who attended Talk Cancer in 2014-15 reported having no previous cancer awareness training.

Talk Cancer gives trainees the knowledge and the confidence to include conversations about cancer as part of their roles. Delivered by Cancer Research UK trainers with nursing backgrounds, the workshops are highly interactive and practical – using scenarios and discussions to show how talking cancer can be part of anyone’s job.

For example, we asked a group of Practice Nurses who attended a bespoke Talk Cancer workshop in Waltham Forest what they planned to do differently, after the training. Their answers included “I will encourage patients to complete bowel screening kits” and “I will create a cancer awareness corner”.

We tailor the content of the workshops around the specific needs of the audience, and have developed a bespoke offering for practice staff based on their needs, setting and availability. You can read about some of the practice staff we’ve trained on page 4.

**Practice staff we’ve trained so far**

We have been delivering training to practice staff for over three years, and last year alone (2014-15) we trained over 300 Practice Nurses, GP receptionists, Medical Secretaries, administrative staff, Health Care Assistants, Practice Managers and other practice staff. Results from pre- and post-workshop questionnaires completed by 282 of these practice staff, have been really positive.

We saw increases in trainees’ awareness of various cancer risk factors. Most notably ‘not doing enough exercise’ increased from 37% to 91%, ‘eating too much red and processed meats’ from 55% to 91% and ‘older age’ from 59% to 94%.

Trainees’ also reported feeling much more confident to discuss cancer-related topics after the workshop.

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Confidence to discuss cancer

![Confidence to discuss cancer diagram](image)

Interestingly, responses indicate that practice staff’s beliefs about cancer were also more positive as a result of the training. The number of trainees strongly agreeing/agreeing with each of the following statements decreased:

- I would find it hard to talk to someone about cancer (30% to 13%)
- I believe that a diagnosis of cancer is a death sentence (14% to 4%)
- I would try to avoid talking to someone about cancer (15% to 6%)

When asked the ‘What’s the first word that comes into your head when you hear the word cancer?’ the most common responses beforehand were related to ‘death/dying’ (27%) and ‘fear’ (21%). Words used after the training were significantly more positive, and were most commonly related to ‘hope’ (26%) and ‘survival’ (13%).

93% of trainees agreed that Talk Cancer was relevant to their role, and 98% would recommend it to others.

Trainees left the following feedback about Talk Cancer:

“**This was really, really interesting and I have learnt a great deal. I think I could now help people be less scared!”** — Practice Administrator

“I came into the session with fear and left full of hope, thank you” — GP receptionist

“Training well presented and interesting. I do believe I have learnt a lot by discussion with group and staff” — Nurse

“Very interesting, informative and enjoyable session - even for a nurse of over 30 years!” — Nurse and Mental Health Practitioner

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**CASE STUDY** – Greater Manchester, Lancashire and South Cumbria Strategic Clinical Network (SCN)
Greater Manchester, Lancashire and South Cumbria SCN had identified a need for cancer awareness training across the SCN area, particularly for practice-based staff. In 2014-15, Cancer Research UK was commissioned to deliver 27 Talk Cancer workshops across the SCN area. The majority of these workshops were specifically for practice staff.

Workshops were three hours long and often held during the surgeries’ Protected Learning Time, when practice staff were available to attend. Most workshops were attended by staff in a variation of practice-based roles, and the groups discussed what practices as a whole can do to encourage healthy lifestyles and promote the importance of early diagnosis to their patients. Other workshops were specifically for particular roles, for example all practice managers, or all practice nurses. This enabled peer support and sharing of similar experiences. Both scenarios received equally positive feedback.

Comparison of pre- and post-workshop questionnaires shows that trainees’ cancer-related knowledge and their confidence to have conversations about cancer increased as a result of the training.

**Graph 1 – Trainees’ confidence to discuss a range of cancer related topics, pre- and post-training**

![Graph showing confidence levels before and after training](image)

We worked closely with the SCN to schedule, organise and provide feedback for each of the workshops.

Here’s what a member of the commissioning party had to say about her experience commissioning Talk Cancer.

“[I would] definitely [recommend Talk Cancer to other groups]. The trainers facilitated the session exceptionally well, taking time to understand the needs of the training group, and tailored their delivery to suit them.

The communication and operational management by the CRUK team has superseded expectation”.

*Quality Improvement Manager (Cancer), NHS England (SCN and Senate) Greater Manchester, Lancashire and South Cumbria.*

To find out more
We are keen to continue working closely with primary care, and train more practice-based staff across the UK. To find out more about our previous work with practice staff, or if you would like to discuss an opportunity to train practice staff in your area, get in touch!

Email: talkcancer@cancer.org.uk

Call: 020 3469 8111

For more information about Talk Cancer generally, you can visit cruk.org/talkcancer or follow us on Twitter @TalkCancer_CRUK.

References


