

NHS GREATER GLASGOW AND CLYDE LEADING ON INNOVATION TO HELP BOWEL CANCER PATIENTS

Project aims to speed up bowel cancer diagnosis

A new initiative is underway in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (NHSGGC) to help speed up the diagnosis of bowel cancer, as part of a UK-wide programme funded by Cancer Research UK.

Scotland has one of the highest rates of bowel cancer, also known as colorectal cancer, in the UK, with around 4,200 people diagnosed each year. * It remains the second most common cause of cancer death in Scotland claiming around 1,700 lives annually and finding more effective ways to tackle the disease is crucial. **

The pilot, which is part of the charity's Test Evidence Transition (TET) programme, and has received additional support from the Bowelbabe Fund for Cancer Research UK, is refining the use of Faecal Immunochemical Tests (FITs) which are available to people with symptoms of bowel cancer through their GP, allowing them to take a poo sample at home and return it by post.

Traditionally, patients with a result showing 10 micrograms of blood per gram of poo or more were referred for further investigation.

Project Lead Dr Stephen McSorley, Consultant Colorectal Surgeon at NHSGGC and Senior Clinical Research Fellow at the University of Glasgow, said:

"This pilot will help us improve how we assess and investigate patients who present to their GP with symptoms that could be caused by bowel cancer.

"By refining the FIT threshold and improving communication between primary and secondary care, we aim to ensure the fastest possible diagnosis for those at highest risk, while maintaining safety nets for others. For the first time, patients will also receive written communication outlining their next steps, helping them feel more informed and supported."

Under this new pilot, the threshold for the most urgent referral is being raised to 20 micrograms in line with changes to the Scottish national guidelines. This is based on evidence that patients with results between 10 and 20 micrograms have a very low chance of having bowel cancer.

The project provides an opportunity to pilot these national changes, whilst also implementing safety-netting measures for patients below the new threshold to help reduce the risk of delayed or missed bowel cancers.

These measures include referring people with FIT results between 10-20 micrograms at a lower priority and offering patients below the new threshold, who continue to show symptoms or have iron deficiency anaemia, a second FIT.

The evaluation of the pilot will be supported by research teams at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge and, if successful, the approach could be adopted by other health boards across Scotland and the wider UK.

Associate Professor Brian Nicholson of the University of Oxford said:

“The safety measures that the team have put in place for their patients will reduce the risk of delayed or missed bowel cancer diagnoses. We are working together to understand how their approach would best be introduced in other regions”.

Despite a national target for 95% of patients to begin treatment within 62 days of an urgent suspected cancer referral, screening referral or direct referral, this has not been met since 2012.*** The NHSGGC pilot aims to address this by streamlining the diagnostic pathway and prioritising those most in need of urgent care.

Whilst the pilot is for symptomatic patients, screening for bowel cancer remains one of the most effective tools for early detection. The NHS Scotland National Bowel Screening Programme invites everyone aged 50 to 74 to take part in regular screening every two years.

Naser Turabi, Director of Evidence and Implementation at Cancer Research UK, said:

“We’re proud to support NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde in this innovative pilot together with the Bowelbabe Fund. Tackling diagnostic delays is critical to improving cancer outcomes, and this project has the potential to make a real difference for patients in the region and beyond.”

TET is a major Cancer Research UK programme which aims to accelerate the adoption of innovation in the health system while reducing inequalities in access to best practice cancer care. Previously, the scheme has focused on reducing waiting times for people with suspected breast and prostate cancer.

The programme supports NHS-led projects across the UK that aim to improve cancer diagnosis and care through innovation and research. It has received £2 million in funding from Cancer Research UK and the Bowelbabe Fund, established in memory of Dame Deborah James, which works to fund cutting-edge research and raise awareness of signs and symptoms of cancer to help give more people more time with the people they love.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

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[Click here for more information](#) on Scotland’s bowel screening programme.

* Based on the average annual number of cases of bowel cancer (ICD10 C18-C20) in Scotland in the years 2018-2019, 2021. Data were provided by the Scottish Cancer Registry, Public Health Scotland (PHS) on request, May 2021.

** Based on the average annual number of deaths from bowel cancer (ICD10 C18-C20) in Scotland in the years 2021-2023. Scotland data were provided by ISD Scotland on request, November 2021.

*** Public Health Scotland, Cancer waiting times. Accessed via: Show all releases - Publications - Public Health Scotland. Last accessed: November 2025.

About Cancer Research UK

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- Cancer Research UK is the world’s leading cancer charity dedicated to saving and improving lives through research, influence and information.
- Cancer Research UK’s pioneering work into the prevention, detection and treatment of cancer has helped save millions of lives.
- Cancer Research UK has been at the heart of the progress that has already seen survival in the UK double over the past 50 years.
- Cancer Research UK supports research into the prevention and treatment of cancer through the work of over 4,000 scientists, doctors and nurses.
- Together with its partners and supporters, Cancer Research UK is working towards a world where everybody can live longer, better lives, free from the fear of cancer.
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For further information about Cancer Research UK’s work or to find out how to support the charity, please call 0300 123 1022 or visit www.cancerresearchuk.org. Follow us on X and Facebook.

About the Bowelbabe Fund for Cancer Research UK

- The Bowelbabe Fund for Cancer Research UK was set up to continue the incredible legacy of Dame Deborah James
- The Bowelbabe Fund for Cancer Research UK funds cutting-edge research, raises awareness of signs and symptoms and challenges stigmas around cancer
- The Fund has raised over £17m thanks to the generosity of the public and partners such as Emma Bridgewater, Penguin and Harkness Roses
- The Bowelbabe Fund for Cancer Research UK is a restricted fund within Cancer Research UK. Cancer Research UK is a registered charity in England and Wales (1089464), Scotland (SC041666), the Isle of Man (1103) and Jersey (247) and is registered with the Fundraising Regulator

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