



Margaret, aged 76,
breast cancer survivor

Breast cancer in women over 70: Information for pharmacy teams

13 July – 6 September 2015

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A national campaign, run by Public Health England, aims to raise awareness of the increased risk of breast cancer in older women and the range of breast cancer symptoms. We need your help to make it a success.

What is Be Clear on Cancer?

Be Clear on Cancer aims to improve early diagnosis of cancer by raising awareness of symptoms and encouraging people to see their doctor without delay.

Has the 'breast cancer in women over 70' campaign been run before?

The campaign was successfully piloted in 2012 and 2013. It went national, across England, for the first time in February 2014.

What is the main message of the campaign?

The key message promoted on TV and in other campaign materials is: '1 in 3 women who get breast cancer are over 70, so don't assume you're past it'. The advert also reinforces the message that finding cancer early makes it more treatable.

A second message, promoted via other campaign materials, is: 'A lump isn't the only sign of breast cancer' and that women over 70 should tell their doctor if they notice any changes to their breasts.

What activities are taking place and when?

Advertising is running from 13 July to 6 September 2015. The adverts are appearing on the TV, in print media including magazines for women and 'out of home' (for example on pharmacy bags and GP TV). Due to the increasing number of older ladies using the internet, advertising is also being featured on key online channels, such as Facebook.

Why focus on breast cancer in women over 70?

Breast cancer survival is lower in older women – more than half of women who die from the disease in England each year are aged 70 and over.^a

Older women are more likely to be diagnosed at a later stage, when the disease is less treatable. If breast cancer is diagnosed at the earliest stage in women aged 70 and over, one-year relative survival is as high as 99%. At a late stage, it drops to just 53%.^b

Finding breast cancer early increases the chances of successful treatment and survival. We need to make sure that older women are aware of breast cancer symptoms, and that they go to their GP if they notice any unusual or persistent changes to their breasts.

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

Most people have quick and easy access to pharmacies and may be more willing to discuss their symptoms in a less formal setting. Therefore, pharmacy teams have a vital role to play.

Older women are more likely to delay seeing their GP about possible cancer symptoms. They could be embarrassed, not realise their symptoms are serious, or worry about wasting their GP's time. Many women, particularly older women, are not aware that possible signs of breast cancer include things like changes to the skin or nipple. They may also not know that their risk of getting breast cancer increases as they get older.

Ensure women are able to have any sensitive conversations in private or in a way that other customers will not be able to overhear. Mention the campaign and the importance of breast awareness in conversations during medicine-use reviews or when handing out medicines, especially with women in the target age group, directing them to their GP if you have any concerns.

Every day, around 15 women aged 70 and over die from breast cancer in England^a

Starting conversations about cancer with customers or patients 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. Find phrases that you are comfortable with. For example, if you wanted to mention breast 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 someone mentions that they have a lump or another relevant symptom, you could ask "Do you think it might be a good idea to discuss that with your GP?"'. Pharmacy staff who feel uncomfortable talking about cancer should seek the advice of a pharmacist.

What symptoms should women look out for?

Awareness that a lump may be a possible sign of breast cancer is relatively high, but for other symptoms it is much lower. The campaign leaflet highlights the following symptoms of breast cancer:

- A lump or thickening in your breast or armpit
- Changes to the skin of your breast
- Changes in the shape or size of your breast
- Nipple changes
- Nipple discharge
- Pain in your breast
- Any other unusual or persistent changes to your breasts.

What if customers have questions about reducing their risk of breast cancer?

There are a number of ways that women can reduce their risk of breast cancer.

The campaign leaflet has some general advice on how women can reduce their chances of developing breast cancer, by: maintaining a healthy weight; cutting down on alcohol; and staying fit and active.

Are women over 70 entitled to free NHS breast screening?

Women aged over 70 are not routinely invited for breast screening because there is no evidence to support this. They are entitled to self-refer every three years if they wish and just need to make their own appointment. Some women in England aged 71–73 are being invited for breast screening as part of a major research trial, but the results of the trial will not be known until the early 2020s.

This campaign focuses on symptomatic breast cancer and how older women are at greater risk. However, screening is mentioned in the campaign leaflet, which is being distributed to key locations such as GP surgeries.

A leaflet is available for women, which gives information about the possible benefits and risks of breast screening, to allow them to make an informed and personal decision about whether to have breast screening.

Is there any evidence that the 'breast cancer in women over 70' campaign will work?

The first national campaign, which ran in early 2014, has shown promising results. When taking all routes to diagnosis into account (including urgent GP referrals and breast screening), the total number of women aged 70 and over diagnosed with breast cancer increased by 31%^c (comparing March–May 2012^d with March–May 2014).

Three things you can do

1 Make it part of your day. Be aware during medicine-use reviews, in conversations with customers or patients, or when handing out medicines to women over 70, that people might want to talk about the campaign. It may prompt those who have previously ignored their symptoms to do something.

2 Give permission. Women may delay going to see their GP and are often looking for reassurance to make an appointment. Ensure women are able to discuss their concerns in private and, where relevant, encourage them to visit their GP. If you feel comfortable, tell them 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 may receive prescription bags with Be Clear on Cancer printed on them – use them with your customers to help raise the profile of the key messages. 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:

- **Order free posters and leaflets:** Visit [Health and Social Care Publications Orderline](#) or call 0300 123 1002
- **View the TV advert:** [nhs.uk/breastcancer70](https://www.nhs.uk/breastcancer70)
- **Alternative formats:** The leaflet is also available in alternative formats including easy read and can be downloaded from [nhs.uk/breastcancer70](https://www.nhs.uk/breastcancer70) or ordered from enquiries@phe.gov.uk
- **For more briefings:** Visit naedi.org/beclearoncancer
- **Campaign website:** [nhs.uk/breastcancer70](https://www.nhs.uk/breastcancer70)

a Deaths data supplied by West Midlands Knowledge & Intelligence Team (KIT) based on Office for National Statistics data (ICD-10: C50).

b National Cancer Research Service data, analysed by West Midlands KIT.

c The result is statistically significant.

d Local pilots ran Jan–March 2012. The regional pilot ran Jan–March 2013, therefore 2012 was used as a base year for the referral data.

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