



Ann Long, lung cancer survivor

Lung cancer: How pharmacy teams can support the national campaign

10 March – 30 April 2014

Following the success of previous *Be Clear on Cancer* lung cancer campaigns, we need your help to keep the momentum going and continue to raise awareness of the symptoms of lung 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 people to see their GP earlier.

The first national lung cancer campaign was in 2012 and was followed by a 'reminder' campaign in July – August 2013.

What activities will be taking place and when?

A national lung cancer campaign will run from 10 March – 30 April 2014. Adverts will appear on TV, radio and in the press.

What are the key messages of this campaign?

Been coughing for three weeks? Tell your doctor.

The other important message that pharmacy teams can pass on is that diagnosing lung cancer early makes it more treatable.

Who is the lung cancer campaign aimed at?

Men and women **over the age of 50**, and their key influencers, such as family and friends.

Why is the campaign focusing on lung cancer?

Lung cancer is England's biggest cancer killer. It has one of the lowest survival rates of any cancer because over two-thirds of patients are diagnosed at a late stage, when treatment that could cure it is not possible. An estimated 1,300 deaths from lung cancer could be avoided in England each year if survival rates matched the best in Europe.

Have the previous lung campaigns shown positive results?

Results to date indicate that *Be Clear on Cancer* is changing levels of public awareness. There are also early indications that clinical outcomes are improving too. These are some of the statistically significant findings following the first national lung campaign in 2012:

- Increases in unprompted awareness of cough/hoarseness (41% pre-campaign to 50% post-campaign) and persistent/prolonged cough (12% pre-campaign to 15% post-campaign);
- Increase of 32% in two week wait referrals for suspected lung cancer in the campaign months compared with the same period in the previous year. The majority of additional referrals were over 50;
- Around 700 more people were diagnosed with lung cancer when compared with the same period in the previous year;
- Around 400 more people had their cancer diagnosed at an early stage;
- Around 300 additional patients had surgery as a first treatment for diagnosed lung cancer.

However, despite these promising results, there is still a great deal of potential to improve lung cancer survival in England, and for this reason, Public Health England is running the lung cancer campaign again.

How can pharmacy teams support this campaign?

You have a crucial role to play in encouraging anyone with symptoms to see their GP. People can delay for a variety of reasons. They may not realise their symptoms are serious; they may worry about wasting the GP's time; or if they suspect cancer, they may fear the diagnosis and treatment. Most people have quick and easy access to pharmacies, and may be willing to discuss their symptoms or worries more easily in this informal setting. By talking face-to-face, you can help people understand the main messages and overcome any concerns.

Starting conversations about cancer with customers and patients can be difficult, are there any tips?

Mentioning the word cancer can be challenging. A Cancer Research UK nurse advises: 'It's important to feel confident and to try and normalise cancer. Remember, this campaign isn't about lifestyle, such as smoking habits, but encouraging people to seek help. Practise and find phrases that you are comfortable with. If you are worried about someone who has repeatedly bought an over-the-counter medicine for a suspected cancer symptom, such as a cough medicine, why not ask them – "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.

Key lung cancer facts

- Around 34,900 people are diagnosed with lung cancer in England every year and around 28,100 people die from the disease
- More than 90% of lung cancer cases are symptomatic at diagnosis, with a cough being most common
- Between 10–15% of lung cancer patients in England are diagnosed at the earliest stage – around 70% are diagnosed at a late stage.

Who is most at risk of lung cancer?

Anyone can develop lung cancer. It affects both men and women and is more common in older age, with 97% of people diagnosed in England aged over 50. Tobacco is by far the biggest cause of lung cancer – smoking causes more than 8 in 10 lung cancers in the UK. People who smoke, used to smoke, or have been exposed to second-hand smoke have an increased risk of developing the disease.

All pharmacies sell over-the-counter (OTC) nicotine replacement products, and some also provide stop smoking services and/or NHS 'Quit Kits'. So you are well positioned to help customers monitor any potential symptoms and encourage people to talk to their GP if they persist.

Why is there no mention of smoking in the advertising for the lung cancer campaign?

We know that including a smoking-related message can delay people from going to see their doctor – smokers may feel that they're being nagged, and non- or ex-smokers might not see it as relevant to them.

What are the symptoms of lung cancer?

Although the campaign is focusing on the symptom of a persistent three-week cough, it is important for you to be aware of other possible symptoms, which include:

- A cough that has got worse or that changes
- Repeated chest infections
- Coughing up blood
- Breathlessness
- An ache or pain in the chest or shoulder that has lasted some time.

If your customers have any of these symptoms, encourage them to see their GP promptly. The chances are it's nothing serious, but if it is, the earlier it's diagnosed, the easier it is to treat.

'Crucially, pharmacists and their teams can help people overcome any barriers to presenting early. I'd encourage all pharmacy staff, especially those selling over-the-counter medicines, to keep a look out for those customers and patients most at risk, and to prompt and support the relevant people to see their GP.'

Ann Gunning, MRPharmS

How are GPs and hospitals preparing for the lung campaign?

NHS Improving Quality is working with Strategic Clinical Networks to help ensure the NHS and local authorities are prepared for the campaign. There are also additional briefing sheets to support GPs and 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 when advising on over-the-counter (OTC) medicines, be mindful that the people you are talking to may have seen the lung cancer campaign. It may prompt people who have previously ignored their symptoms to do something – they may come to your pharmacy to collect a prescription, to buy OTC medicines or to ask for advice.

2 Give permission. Our target audience can delay going to see their GP and often seek permission to make an appointment. Where relevant, encourage customers/patients to visit their doctor. 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 some lung cancer campaign leaflets readily available for customers. You can order these free of charge at orderline.dh.gov.uk or by ringing 0300 123 1002. Finally, 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 naedi.org/beclearoncancer/lung for more information for health professionals
- Test your knowledge and get advice on talking to patients with bespoke interactive modules on lung cancer at the [British Oncology Pharmacy Association's Learning Centre](https://www.britishoncologypharmacy.org.uk)
- The public-facing website for *Be Clear on Cancer* is nhs.uk/lungcancer

'I would urge anybody with symptoms...like a persistent cough, to go and see their doctor straight away. I'm glad I did.'

Ann Long, aged 77, lung cancer survivor