



Dr Nick Davies

Lung cancer awareness campaign: How pharmacy teams can support the campaign in Wales

11 July – 11 August 2016

Last updated: 16 June 2016

NHS Wales is running a national campaign to raise awareness of a persistent three week cough as a symptom of lung cancer – you can help make it a success.

This is a contractual national community pharmacy campaign and is led by NHS Wales' Lung Cancer Initiative (LCI) working with the Health Boards, the Cancer Network, Community Pharmacy Wales and third sector organisations including Tenovus Cancer Care. The Lung Cancer Initiative is one of the Cancer Implementation Groups' priority areas for 2016/17 to improve outcomes for people diagnosed with lung cancer. The awareness campaign is a key part of the Lung Cancer Initiative, which spans the pathway from awareness to treatment.

What is the campaign's key message?

The message for the public is: **Been coughing for three weeks? Tell your doctor.**

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

Pharmacies have a crucial role to play in encouraging anyone with symptoms to tell 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 campaign message and overcome any concerns.

Why lung cancer?

Lung cancer is the 3rd most common cancer in men and the 2nd most common in women and each year is responsible for more deaths than bowel and breast cancer combined¹. Survival from lung cancer in Wales is almost the lowest in Europe at 28th out of 29 countries². If the best lung cancer survival in Europe applied in Wales during 2012, an approximate estimate of well over 340 more people might have survived at least a year, and over 190 more people might survive at least five years. To improve outcomes we need to understand both the epidemiology and presentation of this disease³. GPs now have information on variation in stage at diagnosis and in survival by stage in relation to age, sex and deprivation across clusters⁴. For example only 20% of people with lung cancer presented at Stage I and II in 2012 when the disease is potentially curable⁵.

Earlier diagnosis and rapid access to potentially curative treatments such as surgery and radiotherapy are crucial to improve survival.

What is the Campaign's focus?

The Campaign is based on Public Health England's 'Be Clear on Cancer' and aims to achieve earlier diagnosis of lung cancer by raising awareness of symptoms and, most importantly, encouraging people to see their GP without delay. This message to avoid delay follows on from the findings of the International Cancer Benchmarking Partnership. This research found that people in Wales, as in the rest of the UK, had lower awareness that the risk of cancer increases with age and reported more barriers to presenting their symptoms than other countries⁶, especially worry about wasting the doctor's time.

Key lung cancer facts:¹

- **There are around 2,400 new cases of lung cancer in Wales every year**
- **Only 20% of people present their symptoms to their GP at an early enough stage when the disease is potentially curable**
- **98% of people diagnosed in Wales are aged over 50**

Who is the campaign aimed at?

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

Although smoking is by far the biggest cause of lung cancer, the campaign materials don't lead on smoking; this is because previous lung cancer awareness projects have revealed that leading on a smoking message can delay people from going to see their doctor. However, we know that smokers and ex-smokers are at higher risk.

What activities are taking place and when?

The Wales wide lung cancer campaign will run from 11 July to 11 August 2016, highlighting the symptom of a persistent three week cough.

Adverts will appear on ITV Wales and S4C, on Wales' radio stations, in local papers and online, and on buses. Community awareness raising campaigns will take place as well as media and public relation activities.

Pharmacies will receive a campaign pack in advance of the start of the campaign, containing:

- A Pharmacy briefing (this document)
- 1 A4 bilingual poster
- 1 A3 bilingual poster
- 50 symptom cards
- 50 Leaflets
- Evaluation sheet

Some pharmacies will also receive campaign branded dispensing bags.

Community Pharmacy Wales are supporting this campaign and the Wales Centre for Pharmacy Professional Education (WCPPE) has produced a [training webinar](#) that took place on 14th June and is now available on the WCPPE website.

What are the symptoms of lung cancer?

Although the campaign for the public is focusing on the symptoms of a **persistent three week cough** the campaign leaflet and symptom card also mention coughing up blood / breathlessness / repeated chest infections / feeling more tired than usual for some time / losing weight for no apparent reason and an ache or pain in the chest or shoulder that has lasted some time. Pharmacies should refer the customer to tell their GP if they have these symptoms.

As **additional background information** it is useful for you to be aware of what the 2015 NICE guidelines recommend for GPs. The recommendations for GPs in the 2015 NICE guidelines are that:

An urgent referral is required for people with a chest X-ray that suggests lung cancer or are aged 40 and over with unexplained haemoptysis.

An urgent chest X ray should be offered to people with two or more of the following unexplained symptoms or if they have ever smoked and have one or more of the following unexplained symptoms:

- cough
- fatigue
- shortness of breath
- chest pain
- weight loss
- appetite loss

Consider an urgent chest X-ray to assess for lung cancer in people aged 40 and over with any of the following;

- persistent or recurrent chest infection
- finger clubbing
- supraclavicular lymphadenopathy or persistent cervical lymphadenopathy
- chest signs consistent with lung cancer
- thrombocytosis

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

Mentioning the word cancer can be challenging. A specialist cancer 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 your doctor say about that?" or "do you think it might be a good idea to discuss your symptoms with your GP?"' You could also start conversations as part of MUR consultations and when seeing patients signing up for the smoking cessation service.

How are GPs and hospitals preparing for the lung cancer awareness campaign?

The Lung Cancer Initiative is working with all Health Boards in Wales to help ensure the NHS is prepared for the campaign. GPs and hospital providers are aware that they are likely to get extra referrals during the campaign.

What outcomes can we expect based on similar lung cancer awareness raising campaigns?

Be Clear on Cancer campaigns have run in England since 2010. Results from the first national campaign focusing on symptoms of lung cancer, which ran from May to June in 2012, indicate that the campaign changed levels of public awareness.

- Increases in unprompted awareness of cough as a symptom of lung cancer from 54% pre-campaign to 65% post campaign, with specific mention of persistent / prolonged cough increasing from 12% pre-campaign to 15% post campaign

There were also indications that patients were being diagnosed earlier. These are some of the statistically significant findings following the first national lung cancer campaign in England (2012). Compared to the same period in the previous year, results showed:

- An increase of 9.1% in the number of lung cancer cases diagnosed during the months surrounding the campaign;
- An increase of 3.1 percentage points for the proportion of non-small cell lung cancers diagnosed at Stage I (14.1% to 17.3%). There was also a corresponding 3.5 percentage point decrease in the proportion of people diagnosed at Stage IV (52.5% to 49.0%);
- An increase of 2.3 percentage points (13.7% to 16.0%) for the proportion of patients receiving surgical resections as a first definitive treatment.

No evidence of change was found for the control period of any of the above measures.

Three things that you can do:

1 Promote the campaign in your pharmacy. Put up posters in your pharmacy and hand out the lung cancer awareness symptom cards to people you feel would benefit from talking to their GP about their symptoms.

2 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.

3 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.

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.

- 1 Lung Cancer in Wales. Wales Cancer Intelligence and Surveillance Unit
- 2 De Angelis R et al. Lancet Oncol 2013;15:23-34.
- 3 Lung Cancer in Wales. Wales Cancer Intelligence and Surveillance Unit
- 4 GP Cluster Lung Cancer Profile Overall Summary. Wales Cancer Intelligence and Surveillance Unit
- 5 Lung Cancer in Wales, Wales Cancer Intelligence and Surveillance Unit
- 6 L.J.L. Forbes et al., Differences in cancer awareness and beliefs between Australia, Canada, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and the UK (the International Cancer Benchmarking Partnership): do they contribute to differences in cancer survival? B.J.C (2013), 108, 292-300
- 7 L. Ironmonger et al., An evaluation of the impact of large-scale interventions to raise public awareness of a lung cancer symptom. B.J.C (2015) 112, 207-216

