

CASE STUDY - BOWEL CANCER SCREENING

A partnership project to increase uptake of Bowel Cancer screening in conjunction with ChaMPs, GP practices, Merseyside & North Cheshire screening centre and NHS Public Health teams

It is vitally important for Public Health and Primary Care to work together to improve patient health. GPs are on the frontline and can successfully influence patients to make the right choices for their health. One example of partnership working is a project to increase uptake of bowel screening in Cheshire & Merseyside.



Background

The Cheshire & Merseyside Bowel Cancer Screening Programme uptake pilot project was developed to improve uptake rates by working with GP practices to encourage non-responders to complete the Bowel Cancer screening kit. Bowel Cancer is the third most common cancer in the United Kingdom (UK), and the second leading cause of cancer deaths.

The programme was rolled out in Cheshire and Merseyside from September 2006 until 2007 across primary care trusts (PCTs). Initially, the programme offered screening to men and women aged 60 to 69 years every two years using the Faecal Occult Blood test kit (FOBT kit) and was extended in 2010 to include people up to the age of 75. Test kits are currently sent direct to patients at home from a central hub without any GP involvement.

Uptake rates are as low as 30% in some of the more deprived areas of Cheshire & Merseyside. Research showed some of the barriers to completing the Bowel Cancer screening kit were fear, embarrassment and difficulty actually completing the kit. There was also low awareness that the kit could help spot cancer at an early stage meaning it could be easier to treat.

What was done?

In an effort to increase Bowel Cancer screening uptake rates, ChaMPs developed a pilot campaign in partnership with 16 GP practices in Cheshire and Merseyside and supported by NHS Public Health teams. Previous research had identified that GP endorsement in promoting screening

awareness could be highly beneficial. The campaign ran for three months in early 2011. It aimed to increase uptake rates by 5% in the 16 practices by targeting non-responders and to increase awareness of the programme for future patients.

GPs targeted non-responders in their own practice by sending a letter, patient leaflet, bookmark and DVD to remind them of why they should complete the kit and how to go about it. They also added reminder flags onto patient records so they could discuss Bowel Cancer screening on their next routine appointment. Posters and leaflets were available in the practice to raise awareness with future patients and copies of the DVD were available to take away.

It was also important for health professionals and receptionists at each GP practice to understand the campaign so a tool kit was developed for them to refer to with FAQs if patients needed more information.

What were the results?

The target uptake rate for the project was 5% and the evaluation showed an overall uptake rate of over 11% for the practices that took part. One practice generated an uptake rate of over 40% as the practice manager followed up the letters with a telephone call.

Demographic data was also collected from each GP practice to build up a picture of the people who had previously not responded to identify people with disabilities or learning difficulties for example as these could be reasons for non-participation.

Critical Success Factors

- Endorsement by GP and information being sent to patients direct from practices
- Fully engaged working group of all partners for campaign planning and delivery
- Close liaison with Bowel Cancer screening hub
- A lead GP to co-ordinate practices in their area
- Ability to identify non-responders in each GP practice
- Patient friendly information and eye catching materials with positive messages

What we would do differently?

- Due to the success of one practice manager adding in a follow up call to patients, this stage could be incorporated into any future campaign
- Ensure practices can easily identify non-responders from the outset
- Collecting demographic data was difficult for practices and was a manual task which would need to be remedied in the future

Looking to the future

The ChaMPs screening leads group is awaiting a decision on funding to extend the campaign to further practices in Cheshire & Merseyside and other GP practices are considering rolling out the campaign in their own areas.

For more information

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