



Joan Brown, breast cancer survivor

Breast cancer in women over 70: How practice managers can support the campaign

In early 2014, a national NHS campaign will be raising awareness of breast cancer symptoms in women aged 70 and over. More lives could be saved if women in this age group were diagnosed at an earlier stage.

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.

What is the main message of this campaign?

The key message for women is: **1 in 3 women who get breast cancer are over 70, so don't assume you're past it.**

The campaign also emphasises that a lump is not the only sign of breast cancer and women over 70 should tell their GP if they notice any changes in their breasts.

Who is the campaign aimed at?

In addition to women aged 70 and over, the campaign is aimed at their key influencers, such as friends and family.

Why focus on breast cancer in women over 70?

Breast cancer survival is lower in women aged over 70 than in younger women. Research shows that older women have low knowledge of non-lump breast cancer symptoms and are more likely to delay presenting to their GP with breast cancer.

They might be embarrassed, afraid of treatment, unaware that they are more likely to develop breast cancer or dismissive of symptoms as a sign of ageing. We need to make sure women know that breast cancer risk increases with age, and how important it is to be breast aware and talk to their GP about any unusual changes – diagnosing breast cancer early means treatment is more likely to be successful.

What activities will be taking place and when?

Adverts will appear on daytime TV across England from 3 February to 16 March 2014. A direct mail letter and leaflet will also be sent to a representative sample of women aged 70 and over in key areas.

How do I order campaign materials to put up in our surgery?

You can order leaflets and posters from orderline.dh.gov.uk or by ringing 0300 123 1002.

What impact will this campaign have on my practice?

The initial results from the regional pilot in the Midlands TV region in January–March 2013 suggest that you may see more patients coming to your practice with breast cancer symptoms or mentioning them during home visits. It's difficult to predict the exact impact, but based on the experience of local and regional pilot campaigns, any increase should be manageable. The national bowel cancer campaign in January–March 2012 focussed on a larger target audience and the number of visits equated to approximately one extra patient with relevant symptoms per practice every two weeks.

Three things you can do

1 Brief colleagues

2 Plan for increased activity

3 Promote the campaign

Key facts about breast cancer

- **Breast cancer is the most common cancer in England with around 41,500 women diagnosed each year – of which around 13,500 (a third) are aged 70 and over**
- **Around 5,400 women aged 70 and over die from breast cancer in England every year**
- **More than 90% of all women diagnosed with the earliest stage breast cancer (stage I) survive their disease for at least five years. This figure is around 15% for women diagnosed with the most advanced stage of the disease (stage IV)**

What are the common symptoms of breast cancer?

The [public-facing information](#) highlights a range of symptoms:

- A lump in the breast or armpit
- Nipple changes
- Changes to the skin of the breast
- Changes in the shape or size of the breast
- Pain in the breast or armpit

But if women over 70 notice any changes in their breasts, they should tell their GP.

Are women over 70 still entitled to free NHS breast screening?

The campaign targets women with symptoms, so screening is not mentioned in the TV advert or posters – we want to keep the message simple and direct. But, women over 70 are still entitled to NHS breast screening every three years. They just need to make their own appointment. A new [leaflet](#) is available for women, giving information about the possible benefits and risks to help them make an informed and personal choice about whether to have breast screening. If women would like to have breast screening, they can get details of their nearest NHS breast screening unit by looking on the [NHS Cancer Screening Programmes website](#) or entering their post code or town on the [NHS Choices website](#). Some women might appreciate support in booking an appointment.

It's important to highlight to your patients that the risk of breast cancer continues to increase as women get older. If a patient has symptoms, they should see their GP without delay.

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

Local pilots in 2012 showed encouraging results:

- 8% increase in 2 Week Wait (2WW) referrals for both non-suspected breast cancer symptoms and suspected breast cancer in women over 70 in the pilot area compared with 5% increase in the control area
- 4% increase in the number of breast cancers diagnosed following a 2WW referral for non-suspected breast cancer symptoms in women over 70 in the pilot area compared with a 2% increase in the control area

Results from the regional pilot in January to March 2013 have also been positive:

- Belief that one in three women who get breast cancer are aged over 70 increased significantly after the campaign from 16% to 25%

- For women aged 70–79 there was a 13% increase in referrals for suspected breast cancer symptoms within the regional pilot campaign area

'We've got patients that have been with the practice for a long time and know the whole team really well, so everyone needs to get involved. Practice meetings are a great way to make sure we're ready for any extra appointments and mindful of any patients that might use the campaign messages to try and tell us about any symptoms.'

Jane White, Practice Manager, Gloucestershire

Three things you can do

1 Brief colleagues. Make sure your whole team and any patient groups are aware of the campaign and why it's running. NICE guidelines state that 'primary healthcare professionals should encourage all patients, including women over 50 years old, to be **breast aware** in order to minimise delay in the presentation of symptoms'. There's a separate briefing sheet for [GPs, for nurses and for community groups and volunteers](#). They can watch the TV adverts on [NHS Choices](#) too. Tell your team that there may be more patients wanting appointments, but to remember that women might be embarrassed or feel they're wasting the GP or nurse's time.

2 Plan for increased activity. This is the first time this campaign has been run nationally, so it's difficult to say exactly how many additional patients will be requesting appointments. But be prepared for an increase in the number of women sent for assessment and referred via the urgent 2 Week Wait referral system.

3 Promote the campaign. Display posters and leaflets and encourage your colleagues to talk about the campaign. TV advertising is incredibly powerful at raising awareness of signs and symptoms. But it is often face-to-face discussion that changes behaviour. Talking might prompt someone to make an appointment or open up about their symptoms.

Find out more

- Visit naedi.org/becklearoncancer for more campaign information and resources
- The public-facing website for this campaign is nhs.uk/breastcancer70