

# Campaigns improve awareness of cancer symptoms and boost GP visits

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Awareness campaigns have boosted the public's knowledge of lung and bowel cancer symptoms and increased the number of people who went to their doctor according to one of a series of papers published in a special edition of the *British Journal of Cancer* (BJC) today (Wednesday).

More than six years ago the [National Awareness and Early Diagnosis Initiative \(NAEDI\)](#) was set up to improve the UK's poorer cancer

survival.

The new research confirms that the Be Clear on Cancer campaign led to a jump from 27 to 42 per cent of people who knew that blood in their poo could be a sign of bowel cancer.

Awareness of a cough or having a hoarse throat as a possible sign of lung cancer climbed from 41 to 50 per cent.

Visits to the doctor rose by 29 per cent for bowel cancer symptoms and by 63 per cent for lung.

These results from the first national Be Clear on Cancer bowel and lung campaigns are just one of the topics covered in this special publication.

Other researchers looked at the number of deaths from breast cancer in older women which might be delayed if diagnosis occurred at an earlier stage.

They found 280 [breast cancer](#) deaths could be delayed by more than five years for women over 75 in England if they were diagnosed at the same stage as women aged between 70 and 74.

Researchers also examined how many deaths from melanoma could have been delayed if the stage at diagnosis were the same across men and women, and if there were also no difference in stage at diagnosis between income groups. They found 215 melanoma deaths could be delayed beyond five years in England if men and women from all socio-economic groups had the same level of success in diagnosing the disease.

Publication of the collection of papers focusing on early [cancer diagnosis](#) comes ahead of an [early diagnosis](#) summit and conference later this month.

The National Awareness and Early Diagnosis Initiative (NAEDI) Research Conference convened by Cancer Research UK will bring together researchers, clinicians, patients and policy makers to discuss the latest research findings, their impact on policy, and implications for the future of earlier cancer diagnosis.

Mark Rutherford, at the University of Leicester ([link is external](#)), said: "We've been able to give an idea of the number of cancer deaths that could be postponed if there were no inequalities in when people are diagnosed across different groups, be that age, gender or socio-economic status. Highlighting the number of lives we can prolong gives further weight to the importance of improving early diagnosis. We need to improve the system to diagnose cancer earlier for everyone, regardless of where they live, their income or how old they are."

Sara Hiom, Cancer Research UK's director of early diagnosis, said: "The UK's cancer survival lags behind many other comparable countries, and the stage at which people are diagnosed with the disease plays an important role in this. When cancer is diagnosed at an early stage, treatment is more likely to be successful so it's vital we understand how to speed and improve diagnosis.

"We're learning more about just how complex the issues are and this research adds valuable detail. Campaigns like Be Clear on Cancer have improved the understanding of signs and symptoms and encouraged people to go to their GP when they spot them. We also need to ensure doctors can effectively interpret the symptoms and then refer patients on as quickly as possible. We're seeing progress across the UK, and research is helping to provide the answers about what to do next."

Sean Duffy, national cancer director for NHS England and a co-author of one of the papers, said: "Early diagnosis of cancer is absolutely critical to improving survival. Part of this is helping people understand

what symptoms to look out for, which is why campaigns like this are so important. Patients with possible early signs and symptoms should visit their GP so they can be referred for tests where necessary, and treatment can start quickly. Early diagnosis is a key focus for us and will form part of the NHS's new five year strategy for [cancer](#), which is being developed by an independent taskforce."

**More information:** Papers are available here:  
[www.nature.com/bjc/journal/vao ... /index.html#03032015](http://www.nature.com/bjc/journal/vao.../index.html#03032015)

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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