

Tailored health campaigns to spot cancer

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Credit: King's College London

Tailored health campaigns could help ethnic groups spot cancer symptoms earlier

Developing campaigns that are relevant to different cultures is vital to make sure more people from all ethnic groups across England get cancer symptoms checked out early, according to research published in the *British Journal of Cancer*.

This is the largest study looking at ethnic differences in public awareness of cancer symptoms and barriers to seeking medical help in England, and the first study to address this using all large ethnic groups living in the country.

Data from 18 surveys showed that overall, recognition of potential cancer symptoms was lower among minority ethnic groups. Bangladeshis and Black Africans recognised the smallest number of potential cancer

symptoms. Barriers to seeing the doctor were also higher in general among minority groups.

South Asians, especially Indian and Pakistani people, were more likely than White British people to report emotional and practical barriers to seeing their doctor, such as lacking confidence speaking to their doctor, feeling embarrassed, or being worried about many other things.

White British people were more likely than any other ethnic group to say that feeling worried about wasting the doctor's time would stop them from seeking medical help even if they had noticed a symptom that they think might be serious.

Black people, especially those who regarded themselves as Black Africans, were least likely to report barriers to seeking medical advice.

Maja Niksic, lead author from Cancer Studies at King's College London, said: "Our research highlights important differences in cancer symptom awareness between the white people and ethnic minorities, as well as between different ethnic minority groups, in England. Acknowledging these differences could encourage more people to get potential cancer symptoms checked early.

"The large size of this study meant that we were able to look at very specific ethnic groups. For example, instead of grouping all South Asians together we were able to separate Indians from Pakistanis and Bangladeshi people, and Black Africans from Black Caribbeans as these groups have very different needs, which should be addressed when developing campaigns."

Jessica Kirby, Cancer Research UK's senior health information manager, said: "We know that people from some ethnic minority groups are less likely to be aware of cancer symptoms and less likely to report

symptoms to their GP. This research highlights the need for better campaigns that are tailored to address the differences in awareness between [ethnic groups](#) in England.

"It's important that everyone knows what's normal for their body and can see a doctor if they notice anything unusual. Recognising and reporting potential cancer symptoms early could help spot the disease at an early stage giving a better chance of survival."

More information: Maja Niksic et al. Ethnic differences in cancer symptom awareness and barriers to seeking medical help in England, *British Journal of Cancer* (2016). [DOI: 10.1038/bjc.2016.158](https://doi.org/10.1038/bjc.2016.158)

Provided by King's College London

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