

New drive to cut childhood brain tumour diagnosis times

January 17 2017, by Emma Rayner



Credit: University of Nottingham

A new campaign to reduce the time it takes to diagnose brain tumours in children and young people has being launched today.

[HeadSmart](#) is a UK-wide partnership between the Children's Brain Tumour Research Centre at The University of Nottingham, The Brain Tumour Charity and Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health. It has already helped to cut the average diagnosis time from more than 13 weeks to 6.5 weeks but the aim is to reduce this time further.

Families and [young people](#) affected by childhood [brain](#) tumours are backing the new [campaign](#) to raise awareness of the disease and its symptoms. They will be joining doctors and brain cancer researchers at a formal launch today (16 January 2017) at the Royal College of General Practitioners in London.

Among those due to attend are three of The Brain Tumour Charity's Young Ambassadors – Harry Graham, Emma Barnett and Tom Peddie - all of whom were diagnosed with a brain tumour at a young age and now support HeadSmart. Sacha Langton-Gilks, who lost her son to a late-diagnosed brain tumour in 2012 and is now HeadSmart's lead community champion, will also be there.

The campaign includes pocket-sized symptoms cards and a website, giving information on the warning signs of a brain tumour in babies, [children](#) and teenagers. These include vomiting, balance problems and unusual eye movements.

HeadSmart is based on research into the most commonly-presented symptoms of childhood brain tumours, carried out by the Children's Brain Tumour Research Centre.

After a review of all the evidence, newly-added symptoms in the relaunched campaign include increasing head circumference in under-fives and loss of vision across all age groups. The new campaign also features an icon, nicknamed Sam. Each of the 10 key [childhood brain](#) tumour symptoms is represented by Sam in a different, easily-recognisable form.

Professor David Walker from the Children's Brain Tumour Research Centre said: "The HeadSmart campaign has been tremendously successful so far in reducing diagnosis times and raising awareness among families and their GPs but there is still room for improvement. Ten years ago, the time between first onset of symptoms and diagnosis of a brain tumour was on average 14 weeks. It's now around 6.5 weeks but an even shorter interval would significantly improve the prognosis for children who develop the disease and reduce the side effects of treatment.

"There is also a significant difference in diagnosis times between age groups. Half the children under 5 are diagnosed within 3.9 weeks after symptom onset, for children aged 5 – 11 years it is 6.6 weeks and for teenagers it rises to 9.9 weeks so this discrepancy urgently needs addressing.

"Our relaunch of the HeadSmart campaign uses new evidence, justifying a new approach to healthcare professionals, young people and parents of younger children. With this revised approach we aim to further accelerate the speed of diagnosis by helping doctors, young people and their families to work better together in selecting those who need a brain scan to diagnose or exclude a [brain tumour](#)."

Hayley Epps, campaign manager for The Brain Tumour Charity, said: "Brain tumours kill more children in the UK than any other type of cancer. HeadSmart has two aims: to save lives and reduce long-term disability by bringing down diagnosis times. Relaunching the campaign will help us to achieve those goals by alerting more healthcare professionals, parents and young people to the signs and symptoms of the disease."

Provided by University of Nottingham

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