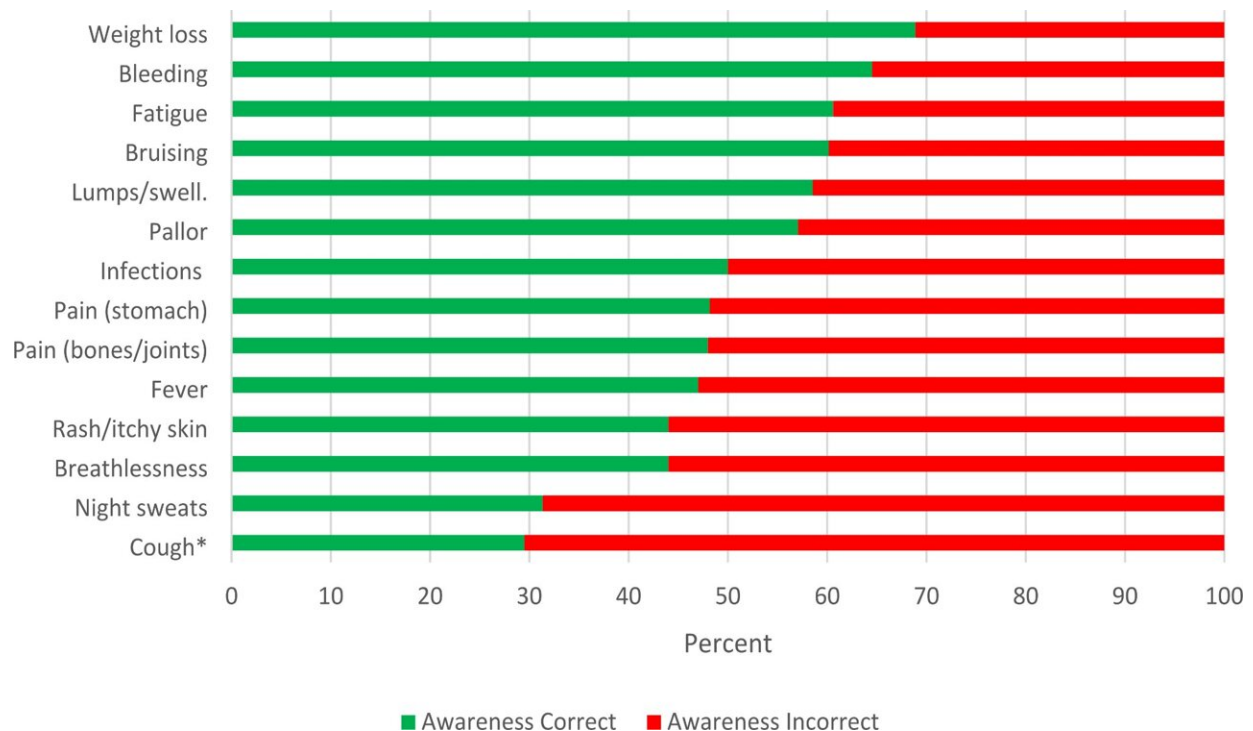


New tool pinpoints gaps in awareness of blood cancer symptoms

July 14 2023



Symptom awareness. *Cough was included as a non-blood cancer symptom.
Credit: *BMC Cancer* (2023). DOI: 10.1186/s12885-023-11149-x

A new tool could help identify gaps in the public's knowledge of blood cancer symptoms—helping to shape future awareness campaigns that could save countless lives.

Researchers from the University of Surrey and Queen Mary University of London (QMUL) developed a new tool known as the Blood Cancer Awareness Measure. It has been designed to quantify public knowledge of symptoms of [blood cancer](#), including leukemia, lymphoma, and myeloma, which is the third leading cause of cancer death in the U.K.

Professor Katriina Whitaker, Lead for Cancer Care at the University of Surrey, said, "Tools such as these are vital to help improve earlier diagnosis of cancer. Assessing public awareness of cancer symptoms helps us identify knowledge gaps within the population and recommend remedies.

"Spotting cancer at an early stage saves lives. However, for blood cancer, symptoms are less known, and people often attribute them to other ailments, slowing down the diagnosis process."

Using the tool, which included a validated online survey and a series of interview questions, researchers found that:

- Nearly 70% of people are not aware night sweats are a symptom of blood cancer and 56% did not recognize rashes/itchy skin as an indicator of the disease.
- Unexplained weight loss (70%) and unexplained bleeding (65%) were most recognized symptoms of blood cancer.
- Men had lower knowledge of blood cancer symptoms than women, who were twice as likely to recognize bruising as a sign of the disease.

As part of their continued work into blood cancer, the research team also

investigated the role of patient enablement for those experiencing potential blood cancer symptoms. Patient enablement is defined as a patient's ability to understand and cope with illness and life after a consultation with a doctor.

Surveying 434 people, researchers found that 52% had experienced at least one potential blood cancer [symptom](#) with people reporting an average of two symptoms. Following a series of questions to determine levels of patient enablement researchers were surprised to find that those who scored highly on patient enablement were less likely to seek help from their GP for potential blood cancer symptoms.

However, enablement was important for re-consultation behavior (e.g., when symptoms didn't go away), which is important when experiencing blood cancer symptoms, which are often vague and non-specific.

Rincy George, Policy Officer at Blood Cancer UK, said, "Timely diagnosis is crucial for those facing a blood cancer diagnosis, which is the UK's fifth most common cancer. This new tool is a significant step towards understanding the gaps in public awareness of blood cancer symptoms. By identifying these knowledge gaps, it can help shape impactful awareness campaigns that have the potential to save lives. It remains crucial that people can recognize the signs of blood cancer including unexplained weight loss, drenching night sweats, or itchy skin. If you have any concerns or questions about [blood cancer](#) symptoms, don't hesitate to speak to our dedicated specialist nurses on 0808 2080 888."

Research was published in the Journals [BMC Cancer](#) and [Psycho-Oncology](#).

More information: Laura Boswell et al, Assessing awareness of blood cancer symptoms and barriers to symptomatic presentation: measure

development and results from a population survey in the UK, *BMC Cancer* (2023). [DOI: 10.1186/s12885-023-11149-x](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12885-023-11149-x)

Katriina L. Whitaker et al, The relationship between patient enablement and help-seeking in the context of blood cancer symptoms, *Psycho-Oncology* (2023). [DOI: 10.1002/pon.6170](https://doi.org/10.1002/pon.6170)

Blood Cancer Awareness Measure tool is available [here](#)

Provided by University of Surrey

Citation: New tool pinpoints gaps in awareness of blood cancer symptoms (2023, July 14) retrieved 21 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-07-tool-gaps-awareness-blood-cancer.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--