

23 September, 2010

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Gateway reference number: 14826

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Dear Colleague,

I am writing to inform you of our plans to run large-scale pilot campaigns to promote early diagnosis of bowel cancer. The aim of the campaigns is to improve the public's awareness of the signs and symptoms of the disease and encourage people with the appropriate symptoms to see their GP sooner.

It is estimated that there are about 10,000 avoidable deaths from cancer every year in England. The key to preventing the majority of these deaths is early diagnosis, as this increases the likelihood of successful treatment. Late diagnosis remains a major reason for the poorer survival rates in England compared with other countries in Europe. We have made a commitment, as set out in our White Paper *Equity and excellence: Liberating the NHS*, to improve cancer survival outcomes and to focus on patient needs and wishes, and tackling late diagnosis is crucial to delivering this commitment.

We have been working with local NHS organisations to look at different ways of tackling late diagnosis, particularly in terms of local campaigns to raise awareness of cancer symptoms and to encourage early presentation. We now want to progress this work by running large-scale pilots to inform a possible future national campaign. We have decided to start with bowel cancer, as it is one of the three most common forms of cancer and the cancer for which we believe there is the most scope for rapid improvement in outcomes. Before we consider undertaking a nationwide campaign, we need to test the approach and so we will start in targeted areas of the country. The pilots will run from January 2011, and are expected to last for a period of four to six weeks. The locations for the pilots have yet to be decided, but we hope to be in a position to announce them shortly.

Further details need to be developed, but it is likely that the pilots will involve television and press advertising. The aim is to reach individuals who are most at risk of bowel cancer and are likely to delay seeing their GP. There will also be separate activity involving cancer charities to help reinforce positive messages about cancer survival.

We want to encourage appropriate presentations at primary care and onward referrals to secondary care. We will keep the pilot campaigns well targeted and focused, and thereby minimise the number of inappropriate presentations. It would be helpful, however, if Trust Chairs could ensure that their trusts are aware of the planned campaign, so that they are ready for additional presentations by patients with symptoms.

We are working with the National Cancer Action Team to arrange for GP and Public Health Leads based in Cancer Networks to support primary and secondary care as necessary.

In addition to the pilots, funding has been provided this year for local primary care trusts (PCTs) to run early cancer diagnosis campaigns and other community-based initiatives that will focus on breast, bowel and lung cancers. We will also be producing materials that PCTs can use locally if they wish. This will ensure a consistent approach and maximise value for money.

It is vital that we continue to make progress in this area if we are to achieve our ambitions of improved outcomes. The National Awareness and Early Diagnosis Initiative is a key part of our strategy to achieve this, as well as improving intervention rates for older people, ensuring new treatments are quickly accessible and extending the age ranges for breast and colorectal screening.

We will use the usual communication channels to keep you informed about the campaign, as we move closer to its launch.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Burstow', written in a cursive style.

PAUL BURSTOW