



Cancer Research UK – 6th May 2020

Supporting prompt help-seeking amongst the public during the COVID-19 pandemic

As we have progressed through the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been increasing interest in how the public/patients are taking action on their health. GPs have reported fewer consultations for non-COVID-19 symptoms, which could include those linked to cancer, contributing to reported and actual reductions in urgent suspected cancer referrals. Drivers for this are likely to include reluctance to add additional burden to the health service, and fear of COVID-19 infection.

The situation has the potential to significantly undermine our efforts to drive earlier presentation and earlier diagnosis of cancer. It is vital that we support and empower the public to continue to contact their GP when they notice concerning symptoms or other changes which are unusual for them. And it is imperative that primary care is ready to receive patients and has access to the diagnostics and pathways that are needed to progress patient management and care.

CRUK has responded to intelligence about the public/patients not presenting in a timely way, by creating [new online content](#) and a [short video](#) with further shareable resources in development. This content features our key messages, which will be kept under review:

Key messages:

- You should still contact your doctor if you notice a change that isn't normal for you, or if you have any possible signs and symptoms of cancer.
- Even if you're worried what the symptom might be, or about getting coronavirus, don't delay contacting your doctor.
- The symptom might not be due to cancer. But if it is, the earlier it's picked up the higher the chance of successful treatment.
- You won't be wasting your doctor's time.
- Once you've spoken to your GP, you can agree what happens next. Even if you don't need to be referred right now, it's better to have told your doctor about your symptoms.
- Let your GP or the specialist team know if your symptoms get worse or don't get better.

We've also worked up example messages that could be used on GP practice websites or sent as text messages at practice level. This follows intelligence gathered from CRUK GPs and the Facilitator programme highlighting interest from Cancer Alliances, Clinical Commissioning Groups, Health Boards (Scotland), Health and Social Care Trusts (Northern Ireland) and GP practices to push messages through their own channels.

Example messages for text messaging and/or practice website:

- Your GP practice is open, and you should contact us if you notice a change that isn't normal for you or if you have a symptom that you are worried about.
- Your GP practice is open. If you need to get in touch with your GP, we are ready to help you safely and can arrange tests if needed.
- Your GP practice is open. If you need to get in touch, we are ready to help you safely - by phone, or video link – and can arrange tests if needed.

National activity

As well as interest at a local level, nations of the UK are also increasingly considering what role they might play, and England and Scotland have recently launched campaigns. There is significant opportunity for local activity to amplify and consolidate the national activity and to help it reach those most in need.

NHS England: NHS 'OPEN FOR BUSINESS' CAMPAIGN

This campaign, launched on 25th April, intends to address the issue of reduced attendance by giving people 'permission' to access NHS services and reassuring them that they won't be a burden on the NHS.

The overarching campaign targets all adults and is supported by communication activity that will target specific patient groups with messages that are relevant to their situation and condition, including cancer patients and those with possible signs and symptoms of cancer.

The media channels are (limited to England only): Social media, digital channels and press only.

Key generic messages are:

- If you need medical help, the NHS is still here for you.
- Contact your GP practice, use NHS 111 online or call 111.
- If it's serious or life threatening, call 999.
- Patients should still attend hospital if told to go or for pre-existing appointments unless told not to go.
- The NHS will give you the care that you need.

Cancer-specific messages:

- If you have a symptom that you are worried about, you must contact your GP practice.
- Your clinician will discuss with you the benefits of starting or continuing your cancer treatment against the increased risks of contracting coronavirus.

Resources to support the campaign are available via the [PHE resource centre](#).

On Wednesday 29th April the 'help us, help you' message of the campaign was focused on cancer. CRUK Chief Executive Michelle Mitchell contributed to a [NHSE/cross charity video](#) that was shared on social media, and CRUK issued a range of supportive tweets on the CRUK main and CRUK policy twitter handles.

NHS Scotland: The NHS is Open 'If it's urgent, it's urgent'

An integrated campaign which will run throughout Scotland across TV, radio, digital and social media from 24th April.

Overarching messages:

- GP surgeries and hospitals are still there for you – whether you have a non-coronavirus health concern, are showing possible cancer signs or have an immunisation appointment.
- If you have a non-coronavirus health condition contact your GP practice, dial 111 out of hours, or call 999 in an emergency.

Cancer-specific messages:

- If you have a potential cancer symptom, present to your GP as we know early detection provides a better prognosis.
- If you or a loved one is concerned about a potential cancer sign or symptom, don't delay contacting your GP practice. It's best to get checked as the earlier cancer is found the easier it is to treat.
- The NHS is still here for you. Find information on signs and symptoms at www.getcheckedearly.org

We will continue to gather intelligence and evidence about the impact of COVID-19 on public and patient behaviour, and are keen to understand the nature and impact of mitigating activities. If we are missing anything that you think could be helpful, please let us know at earlydiagnosis@cancer.org.uk.