



Be Clear on Cancer: Third national lung cancer awareness campaign, 2014

Caveats: This summary presents the results of the metric on urgent GP referrals for suspected cancer. This is one of a series of metric summaries that will be produced for this campaign, each focusing on a different metric. A comprehensive interpretation about the campaign is not included here as this requires a full evaluation of all the metrics. The full evaluation will be part of the final campaign report which will be published in due course. These metrics should not be considered in isolation.

Urgent GP referrals for suspected cancer

The campaign

The third national lung cancer awareness campaign ran from 10 March 2014 to 30 April 2014 in England.

The campaign's key message was:

- 'Been coughing for three weeks? Tell your doctor.'

Metric: Urgent GP referrals for suspected cancer

This metric considers whether the third national lung cancer awareness campaign had an impact on the number of urgent referrals for suspected lung cancer, often referred to as two week wait (TWW) referrals. It uses data from the National Cancer Waiting Times Monitoring Data Set, provided by NHS England, presented by month first seen. The analysis compares the campaign period (March to May 2014) with the same three months in 2013.

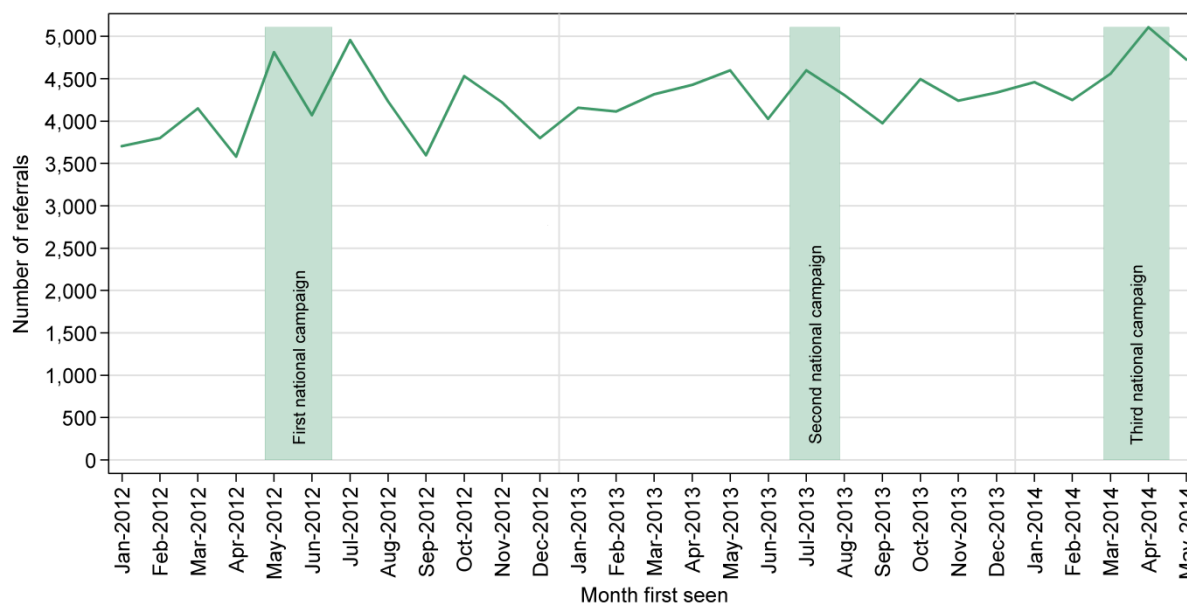
Results

From January 2012 to May 2014, there was an upward trend in the number of urgent GP referrals for suspected lung cancer, including a period of increased activity during and following the first national campaign (Figure 1). During and following the third national campaign (March to May 2014), there were 14,398 urgent GP referrals for suspected lung cancer in England, compared to 13,350 in the same three months in 2013, representing an increase of 8% ($p < 0.001$). Nevertheless, there was a larger increase (15%) in referrals for suspected head and neck cancers, which were treated as a control group. This suggests that the increase in suspected lung cancer referrals may reflect an underlying trend rather than a particular impact of the campaign. The number of referrals increased for both males (7%) and females (9%), as well as for all age groups; ranging from 6% for those aged 80 and over to 13% for those aged under 50.

Key messages

Comparing the campaign period (March to May 2014) with the same months in 2013, there was a statistically significant 8% increase in the number of urgent GP referrals for suspected lung cancer in England. This needs to be considered in light of the long-term increasing trend for the number of urgent GP referrals for suspected cancer.

Figure 1: Monthly number of urgent GP referrals for suspected lung cancer, January 2012 to May 2014, England



Conclusions

The third national lung cancer awareness campaign may have led to a small increase in urgent GP referrals for suspected lung cancer during and following the campaign. In England, there was an 8% increase in the number of suspected lung cancer referrals, from March to May 2013 to March to May 2014.

Other metrics being evaluated include emergency presentations, conversion and detection rates, numbers of cancers diagnosed, stage at diagnosis and one-year survival. A full evaluation report will be published on the campaign metrics when all of the results are available.

Considerations

In general, cancer incidence is increasing which may have an impact on trends over time for this and other metrics; the results must be considered with these underlying trends in mind.

Where the results are statistically significant there is some evidence for an impact of the campaign, although underlying trends and other external factors (eg other awareness activities, changing referral guidance) may also affect the results.

Campaigns are more likely to have a greater impact on metrics relating to patient behaviour (eg symptom awareness and GP attendance with relevant symptoms) and use of the healthcare system (eg urgent GP referrals for suspected cancer), compared to disease metrics (eg incidence, stage at diagnosis, and survival).

Find out more about Be Clear on Cancer at:

www.ncin.org.uk/be_clear_on_cancer

www.nhs.uk/be-clear-on-cancer