

Bowel Cancer Awareness Month in April



Bowel cancer is the UK's second biggest cancer killer yet it's a disease which is often overlooked and diagnosed too late. Every year over 41,500 people (one every 15 minutes) are diagnosed with bowel cancer and around 16,000 people die of the disease.

2016 marks the ten year anniversary of the introduction of bowel cancer screening in England. During Bowel Cancer Awareness Month in April people are encouraged to spread the word among their family, friends and colleagues about the benefits of participating in bowel cancer screening. The NHS Bowel Cancer Screening Programme is designed to identify bowel cancer in people who have no symptoms. Since its launch 10 years ago, it has been proven to save lives. Screening is available every two years to people aged 60 – 74. Yet uptake rates remain low. In many areas of the UK less than half of people offered the screening actually complete it.

Chris Groves, Director of Screening for South West London Bowel Cancer Screening Centre at St George's Hospital, said "We were pioneers of bowel screening at its inception and have successfully treated hundreds of screen detected cancers with almost universally successful outcome. This often silent disease can be found in its early stages by use of a simple test at home but many people are put off by the thought of providing a stool sample. We strongly encourage participation in the screening programme and are constantly working on ways of making it easier for patients to do so. There should be no excuse for ignoring this opportunity, if you are between 60 and 74 years of age you will receive a postal invitation every two years. Make sure you, your friends and relatives help us to beat bowel cancer"

South West London Bowel Cancer Screening Centre, based at St George's Hospital, Tooting, London have also started to roll out an additional new national screening programme which offers a flexible sigmoidoscopy (a small camera in the back passage) called a bowel scope for all new 55 year olds. This is offered in Wandsworth and Richmond at the moment. Sutton residents will be offered the test around September this year with Merton, Kingston and Croydon residents being offered the bowel scope programme before the end of 2017.

Although bowel cancer affects more than one in 20 people in their lifetime, of those who get the disease, nine out of ten people survive if it is caught early. Be aware of symptoms of bowel cancer which include; Bleeding from the bottom and/or blood in your poo; A change in your normal bowel habit lasting three weeks or more especially to looser or runny poo; Extreme tiredness for no obvious reason; Unexplained weight loss; A pain or lump in your tummy.

For further advice call Bowel Screening free phone helpline **0800 707 60 60** or visit website www.gov.uk/government/publications/bowel-cancer-screening-benefits-and-risks bowelcanceruk.org.uk/understanding-bowel-cancer OR beatingbowelcancer.org/Screening

From South West London Bowel Cancer Screening Centre. 020 8725 0483 St George's University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.