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Cough Cough campaign building on success

Posted on Wednesday 5th September 2012

NHS Cumbria's lung cancer awareness campaign starts its second phase this week with posters on billboards, buses, and notice boards appearing across the county, as well as radio campaigns.

Feedback from the Department of Health following the first round of Cough Cough in Spring 2011 shows more people were referred for urgent two week cancer tests and as a result a further 46 were diagnosed with lung cancer early during the campaign.

Lung cancer is one of the biggest cancer killers and NHS Cumbria has been awarded almost £100 thousand by the Department of Health and an additional £25,000 by the North East Cancer Network to try and raise awareness to help more people in Cumbria with the condition get diagnosed quicker.

Cough Cough will again feature local people who have made full recoveries after having their cancer diagnosed early.

Being a poster girl for NHS Cumbria's Cough Cough cancer awareness campaign has made Carol Scudamore, 67 a local celebrity - however the Great-Grandmother from Barrow says the most important thing is that people have been going to their GPs early with symptoms.

Over five months ago Carol was given a model makeover by local salon Excel and took part in a photo shoot to be the face of the health campaign, advising people to visit their doctor if they had a persistent cough for more than three weeks. Carol was chosen as she knows firsthand the importance of getting cancer diagnosed early to maximise the impact of treatment.

After experiencing a severe pain in her back for two weeks Carol made an appointment to see her GP, and was diagnosed with lung cancer. Within eight weeks the tumour had been removed and Carol was on the road to recovery.

Carol explained: "I had a pain on my left side and initially the doctor thought it was a urine infection. I was called back three days later and sent for an x-ray. I then got a call back to go for a scan and the cancer was discovered. I went to Blackpool for the operation where two-thirds of my right lung was taken away. Since the operation I have not needed any further treatment and I don't have to take any medication - and I now only have to go to Furness Hospital to see the lung specialist, every nine months.

"Finding the cancer early and getting the treatment I needed so quickly saved my life.

"When I was approached by my cancer nurse to ask if I'd be willing to take part in this campaign, I immediately said yes, as I wanted to give something back after the fantastic treatment I'd had in both Barrow and Blackpool. I'm not usually one to seek the limelight, but I wanted to ensure that other people had the same chance to be diagnosed early as I did and hopefully have a good chance of survival like me."

Being a local face of a campaign has increase the impact of the health message, says Carol.

"When I've been in the supermarket even the cashier on the till has asked if I'm the lady on the poster in the pharmacy. My grandchildren have also got into conversations with friends about cancer as my face is on the poster at their college and also the changing rooms of the sports centre.

"I have 14 grandchildren and one great-grandchild. Jennifer my 18 year old granddaughter says she sees my face all over the place, on the back of the bus travelling to college and then in the college itself. All her friends know I'm her grandmother and all about my story.

"And Bill, my 11-year old grandson saw the poster in the football changing room. When he told his friend it was his grandmother on the picture they didn't believe him at first. However when his friends mum came in she knew it

was me. It gets people talking about cancer.”

Since her operation Carol has continued to take her own advice and visit her GP promptly with symptoms. In January this year she started with restless legs, lack of energy and shortage of breath. Carol made an appointment at her local surgery.

Carol said: “I thought ‘this isn’t right’ so I went to see my doctor, who sent me to Lancaster for blood tests. The next day they telephoned to say I was very anaemic, and if I had left it any longer I would have needed a blood transfusion. As it was I was put onto iron tablets and felt the benefit of them very quickly. After taking the full course I now have to wait three months to see if I will need to take iron supplements for the rest of my life or not.

“I have had amazing treatment from the NHS and all the staff have been so kind and friendly - the GPs, Westmorland Hospital, Kendal where I had my breast scan, Furness Hospital in Barrow where I had tests and follow up checks, Blackpool where I had my operation and Lancaster where I had my blood tests. I’d like to say thank you to them all.”

Carol’s personal message is if you have symptoms not ignore them, visit your GP.

Carol’s poster has got people talking about cancer and has encouraged three of her friends to go to their GPs when they had long-term coughs.

Carol added: “Thankfully they were all ok. It was good they went to get checked out. I am really pleased the campaign is working.”

Single father-of-four Colin Pawson will have his face posted all over Cumbria this month, in a bid to help save people’s lives as part of Cumbria’s Cough Cough campaign.

Three years ago Colin had a cough that wouldn’t go away. After his sister Rita insisted he went to see his GP he was diagnosed with lung cancer. This early diagnosis has been fundamental in his recovery and now he wants to help others seek treatment early.

Colin, now 60 from Frizington said: “If my experience can encourage just one person to go to their doctor with the early signs of lung cancer and it save their life it is worth being part of this campaign.”

Colin was one of the original faces of the Cough Cough which was launched in March 2011. The successful campaign will be repeated this autumn and Colin is keen to continue to be part of it.

He said: “Strangers have come up to me in the street in Whitehaven to ask if I am the man from the poster, and ask me more about Cough Cough. I’ve had people say to me ‘I always thought they were actors or models they used for these posters’, and I’ve been able to tell them more about my experience.

“I’m not just a face on a poster but a real person that people can approach, talk to and relate to. When they see the poster they think ‘That could be me, I’m going to the doctors to get checked out.’ I know of two people who did just that, and thankfully they were given the all clear.

“I hope my experience will give people some hope and encouragement to visit their GP.

“Once I was diagnosed I was determined to beat the cancer. My youngest two children need their Dad, at the time they were just three and six. My grown-up children, Danny, 29, and Amanda, 26 would cope without me, but Nathan and Reece had no one else, they need me. Perhaps if I hadn’t had them to think about I might not have fought as hard as I did, but I was determined to survive for them.”

Throughout his three months of Chemotherapy and one month of radical radiotherapy which he had daily at the Cumberland Infirmary Carlisle, Colin continued to take the boys to school, and carry on as normal as possible.

He added: “The early diagnosis and my self-belief I could beat the cancer gave me the best chance of survival.”

Three years on Colin now has check-ups at West Cumberland Hospital every six months. However he has continued to act on his own advice to visit your GP promptly if you have any symptoms.

Colin explained: “I started to get a lot of pain in my neck and shoulder so I went to see my GP who sent me for an x-ray. When I went for my next check up they explained how lung cancer can spread to the shoulder. Tests confirmed it was not cancer but osteoarthritis. I must be the only person to have been glad to be diagnosed with osteoarthritis. I was so please, as I knew that wasn’t going to kill me.”

When Colin was 60 he received his bowel screening test kit through the post. Knowing the importance of catching cancer early he took the test and received a letter back requesting a second test as the first was “unclear”.

Colin said: “I did the second test which was negative and then a third test which was positive. I was called into the Cumberland Infirmary Carlisle for a colonoscopy and thankfully the results were clear. It was a great relief to know I was okay.”

Getting checked out early is Colin’s key message and his poster is on the main entrance door to his boy’s primary school.

"I told the head teacher at school about the campaign and they put the poster up. All the children and their families were told. It really got people talking about cancer and the importance of going to your doctor early with symptoms.

"I started with a cough and no matter what I did it wouldn't go away. I was a smoker for more than 30 years and I thought I'd give up to see if that would stop the cough, but it didn't.

"My sister Rita kept nagging at me to go to the doctors then I started to cough blood. I was on a Weight Watcher's diet at the time and I'd been losing weight. People were saying I looked good for it, but when I look back now it wasn't the diet that was causing the weight loss.

"When I went to see my doctor he acted quickly, sending me immediately for a chest x-ray. Within two days I was back at the surgery for the results.

"He said it could be one of two things, possibly pneumonia but he couldn't rule out the other. He never said the word but I knew what he meant.

"He sent me to West Cumberland Hospital to have a camera put down me, but to be honest by this point I already knew what it was. It was a couple of days before it was officially diagnosed, but I had already prepared for it.

"My philosophy was that it wouldn't beat me, I would beat it. I couldn't let it win, for the boys' sake. I'm a single dad, where would the younger two be without me? They were my inspiration to get better.

"I was fortunate that it hadn't spread anywhere else. I know for a fact that early diagnosis was the key to beating it - that and a positive attitude."

As part of the Cumbria Cough Cough campaign posters, leaflets and adverts will appear in target areas with high rates of lung cancer across the county featuring real Cumbrian people like Colin who've been diagnosed with lung cancer.

Lung cancer is one of the biggest cancer killers and in 2010, the latest year for which figures are available, 313 people in Cumbria died from the condition. On average every year around 385 people are also diagnosed with the condition and it has the lowest five year survival rate of any cancer.

NHS Cumbria has been awarded almost £100 thousand by the Department of Health and an additional £25,000 by the North East Cancer Network to try and raise awareness to help more people in Cumbria with the condition get diagnosed quicker.

The earlier someone is diagnosed with lung cancer, the better their chances of treatment and survival. Symptoms of lung cancer include:

- persistent coughing for several weeks
- unexplained weight loss
- shortness of breath
- chest pain
- blood in phlegm

The campaign will focus on the towns across Cumbria with high instances of the disease - Carlisle, Whitehaven, Workington and Barrow and will run throughout September.

Dr Rebecca Wagstaff is NHS Cumbria's Deputy Director of Public Health. She said: "Lung cancer is one of the commonest cancers and the earlier we catch it, the better people's chances of survival are. This is why we are running this campaign.

"We want to make sure that as many people as possible know what the symptoms are and learn to spot them. That way if a friend or loved one has any of these symptoms, such as a cough which won't go away, then we hope that people will encourage them to go and see a doctor as soon as possible. Often we might be worried about our own health, but put things off, however if someone else shows they are concerned and persuades us to seek help, we are more likely to do this.

"By using real people from Cumbria who've had lung cancer and thankfully, now have a good outlook, I hope it will encourage others to do the same and speak to someone."

For more information visit www.3weekcough.org

Posted on Wednesday 5th September 2012

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