

FEAR, ANXIETY AND EMBARRASSMENT STOP WOMEN GOING FOR BREAST SCREENING

Fear, anxiety and embarrassment are some of the main barriers preventing women from going for breast screening, but this alone does not account for the variations in uptake, according to new work* presented today at the National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) Cancer Conference in Liverpool today (Wednesday).

Researchers from the Gateshead Foundation Trust looked at why breast screening uptake varies between different areas covered by their screening programme.

They found that even in areas of high deprivation – a known reason for low breast screening uptake – GP practices' screening rates still differed by over 10 per cent.

By speaking to women in focus groups they found that fear, anxiety and embarrassment were the main reasons women gave for not attending breast screening. The other reason given was denial of the disease, saying cancer would never happen to them.

Further work also showed women were not aware that breast cancer risk increases with age. And – worryingly – most women could only name two symptoms** of the disease.

Julie Tucker, lead author from the Gateshead Foundation Trust, said: "Our results show that more must be done to tackle the low uptake of screening and poor awareness of breast cancer symptoms. We must ensure that GPs, nurses and health professionals feel able to talk to women about the pros and cons of breast screening as well as what signs and symptoms they need to look out for.

"We also need to dispel some of the myths around breast cancer – it's not a death sentence and more women are surviving this disease than ever before. This in turn will reduce women's fear of the disease. The earlier breast cancer is diagnosed, the better the chance of survival so women shouldn't be afraid of going to the doctor with symptoms or going for regular mammograms."

Dr Jane Cope, director of the NCRI, said: "This is important research to help understand what is putting off some women going for breast screening. Every year over 48,000 women are diagnosed with breast cancer and around 12,000 die from the disease.

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For media enquiries please contact Laura Dibb in the NCRI press office on 0151 239 6043 / 6044 / 6045, or the London press office on 020 3469 8300, or, out-of-hours, the duty press officer on 07050 264 059.

Notes to Editors:

* View the conference abstract here: <http://www.ncri.org.uk/ncriconference/2011abstracts/abstracts/B77.html>

**Symptoms include a lump or thickening in an area of the breast; change in the size or shape of the breast; dimpling of the skin; a change in the shape of the nipple, particularly if it turns in, sinks into the breast or becomes irregular in shape; blood stained discharge from the nipple; a rash on the nipple or surrounding area; swelling or lump in the armpit.

About the NCRI Cancer Conference

The National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) Cancer Conference is the UK's major forum for showcasing the best British and international cancer research. The Conference offers unique opportunities for networking and sharing knowledge by bringing together world leading experts from all cancer research disciplines. The seventh annual NCRI Cancer Conference is taking place from the 6-9 November 2011 at the BT Convention Centre in Liverpool. For more information visit www.ncri.org.uk/ncriconference

About the NCRI

The National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) was established in April 2001. It is a UK-wide partnership between the government, charity and industry which promotes co-operation in cancer research among the 22 member organisations for the benefit of patients, the public and the scientific community. For more information visit www.ncri.org.uk

NCRI members are: the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI); Association for International Cancer Research; Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council; Breakthrough Breast Cancer; Breast Cancer Campaign; Cancer Research UK; CHILDREN with CANCER UK, Department of Health; Economic and Social Research Council; Leukaemia & Lymphoma Research; Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research; Macmillan Cancer Support; Marie Curie Cancer Care; Medical Research Council; Northern Ireland Health and Social Care (Research & Development Office); Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation; Scottish Government Health Directorates (Chief Scientist Office); Tenovus; The Prostate Cancer Charity; Welsh Government (National Institute for Social Care and Health Research); The Wellcome Trust; and Yorkshire Cancer Research.

www.ncri.org.uk/ncriconference

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