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Media Release

Be Loud! Be Clear! Beat Bowel Cancer!

Royal United Hospital cancer specialists are urging the public to BE LOUD about bowel cancer symptoms so that they can help them to BE CLEAR of bowel cancer.

This week, the RUH is supporting the national 'BE LOUD! BE CLEAR!' campaign (26 – 31 January 2009) run by the charity Beating Bowel Cancer. Cancer specialists are raising awareness of bowel cancer symptoms, as well as the importance of early diagnosis and treatment.

RUH bowel cancer nurse specialist Siobhan John says: "Bowel cancer is one of the most curable cancers if it is diagnosed at an early stage. Sadly only 10% of people report their symptoms before the cancer has spread through the bowel wall – giving them a 90% chance of being successfully treated. In the UK, the number of people dying from bowel cancer is equivalent to a DC-10 passenger aircraft crashing every week.

"The most common symptoms to look out for are a change in bowel habit for more than six weeks, bleeding from the bottom without any obvious reason, abdominal pain or a lump in your tummy. Other symptoms to also be aware of include unexplained anaemia causing tiredness or weight loss.

“Maintaining a healthy diet, exercising, not smoking, and reducing alcohol consumption are things we can do to help reduce the risk of developing cancer. However, it’s important to remember that a healthy lifestyle does not exempt us from developing bowel cancer; we all need to be aware of likely symptoms and visit our GP if we have concerns.”

Ray Brigden, 62, from Bath was diagnosed with bowel cancer in April 2008. “I am a keen runner and at the time was running six times a week. I noticed that I was getting slower but put this down to age. The only other symptom that I noticed was blood on some toilet paper.

“Coincidentally I was visiting my GP about something else soon after this. At the end of this visit, he asked if there was anything else he could help me with. I had recently seen a TV programme that had talked about the symptoms of bowel cancer; this prompted me to mention the blood on the toilet paper. My GP immediately examined me and as a result arranged for me to have a scan at the RUH. It was shortly after this that I was told that I had grade two bowel cancer. I had a week long course of radiotherapy followed by surgery and chemotherapy. Treatment has been successful so far and I will continue to have follow up scans to make sure the cancer has not returned.

“The news that I had bowel cancer did not come as a complete surprise; I was already aware of the possible outcome as a result of watching the TV programme. What did shock me was that I had been living such a healthy lifestyle. I had been running since 1973, sometimes twice a day and often competing. I was a vegetarian, did not smoke and had only a maximum of three or four single drinks a week.

“I think there is a real danger that people with healthy lifestyles may be complacent if they have symptoms and as a result not get the treatment they need to help them beat the cancer. I received my diagnosis in time but would urge anyone with similar symptoms to see their doctor as soon as they can.”

Ends