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Media Release

Be Clear on Cancer – talk to your doctor

The Royal United Hospital is backing a Government campaign to encourage people to talk to their doctor if they are worried about their bowels.

The Be Clear on Cancer campaign runs until the end of the month, and aims to raise awareness of the symptoms of bowel cancer and encourage anyone with these symptoms to see their doctor.

Nearly one third of people in the South West feel too embarrassed to talk to their doctor about their bowels, according to a survey by the Department of Health.

The survey also found there is little awareness of bowel cancer, despite it being England's third most common cancer, with around 34,000 new cases each year. It affects both men and women and is responsible for around 13,200 deaths a year. Ninety per cent of people diagnosed with bowel cancer are aged over 55 and those with a family history are at more risk.

Early detection of bowel cancer makes it more treatable. The main symptoms to look out for are blood in poo or looser poo for three weeks or more.

Consultant Gastroenterologist at the RUH, Dr John Linehan, says: "While nobody likes thinking about cancer, or talking about their poo the fact is that early diagnosis makes a huge difference to your chance of survival.

"Many people believe if you have bowel cancer there is no hope. In my experience it doesn't have to be this way – bowel cancer can be treated.

"It's important for people to be aware of the symptoms of bowel cancer. If you have blood in your poo or looser poo for three weeks or more, then see your GP.

"It's very straightforward for your GP to examine you and determine whether to send you for further tests. If your GP suspects it might be bowel cancer you will see a specialist within two weeks and we will then arrange for further tests and, if necessary, treatment. You will either get reassurance that it isn't bowel cancer, or you will find out it is and have a better chance of survival. Go with your instincts, if you are worried then see your GP."

The RUH takes part in a screening campaign which sees men and woman aged 60-69 sent self-test kits through the post for them to send back a stool sample to the laboratory.

Lab analysis can find tiny spots of blood, which are invisible to the eye but give an indication that further investigation is needed.

For further information about the symptoms of bowel cancer, please visit www.nhs.uk/bowelcancer

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