



Be Clear on Cancer: Third national breast cancer in women over 70 campaign, 2018

Caveats: This summary presents the results of the metric on two-week wait referrals. This is one of a series of summaries that will be produced for this campaign, each focusing on a different metric. A comprehensive interpretation of the campaign incorporating a full evaluation of all the metrics is published separately. These metrics should not be considered in isolation.

Two-Week Wait referrals

The campaign

The third national breast cancer in women over 70 campaign ran from 22 February 2018 to 31 March 2018 in England.

The core campaign messages were:

- 'One in three women who get breast cancer are over 70, so don't assume you're past it.'
- 'A lump isn't the only sign of breast cancer. If you're worried about any changes to your breasts, tell your doctor straight away.'

Key messages

The third national breast campaign appears to have had an impact on the number of urgent GP referrals for suspected breast cancer for women aged 70 years and over, and may have had some impact on the number of breast symptom referrals for women aged 70 to 79 years.

Metric: Two-Week Wait referrals

This metric considers whether the third national breast cancer in women over 70 campaign had an impact on the number of two-week wait (TWW) referrals, either as urgent GP referrals for suspected breast cancer or as breast symptom referrals. It uses data from the National Cancer Waiting Times Monitoring Data Set, provided by NHS England, presented by month first seen. The analysis period was March to April 2018 and was compared to the same 2 months in 2017.

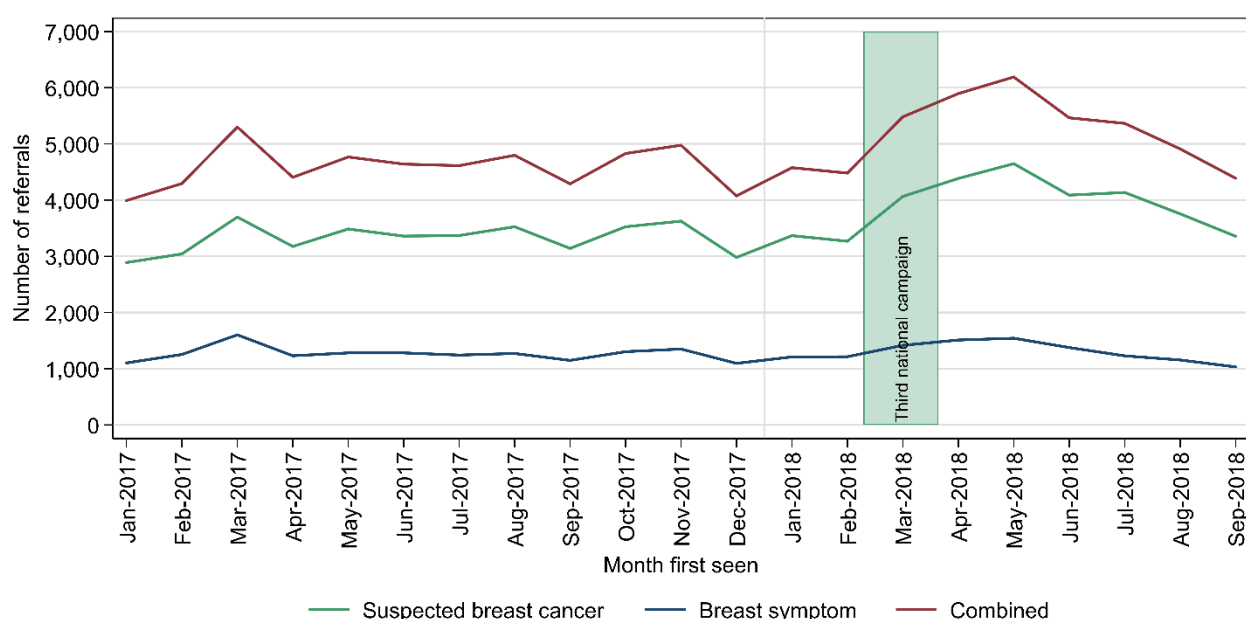
Results

A general upward trend in the number of urgent GP referrals for suspected breast cancer in women aged 70 and over can be seen across the time period with an additional peak seen between February and July 2018, during and following the third national breast campaign (Figure 1). The number of breast symptom referrals remained relatively steady across the entire time period (January 2017 to September 2018), although with a slight peak during and following the campaign.

There was a statistically significant 23% increase in urgent GP referrals for suspected breast cancer between March to April 2017 and March to April 2018, from 6,873 to

8,450 referrals ($p < 0.001$) in women aged 70 and over in England. During the same period there was a 3% increase in the number of breast symptom referrals, from 2,832 to 2,926; however, this was not statistically significant ($p = 0.215$). An overall statistically significant increase of 17% was seen for the combined referrals, from 9,705 to 11,376 referrals ($p < 0.001$). The increases in urgent GP referrals for suspected breast cancer and combined referrals were larger than the increase seen in urgent GP referrals for other suspected cancers (5%; $p < 0.001$). A statistically significant increase of 6% was seen in the number of breast symptom referrals for those aged 70 to 79.

Figure 1: Monthly number of urgent GP referrals for suspected breast cancer, breast symptom referrals and combined referrals, from January 2017 to September 2018, England, women aged 70 and over



Statistically significant increases in the number of urgent GP referrals for suspected breast cancer were seen for all deprivation quintiles. The largest increase was seen for the least deprived quintile (27%; $p < 0.001$) and the smallest increase was seen for the most deprived quintile (16%; $p < 0.001$). There were no statistically significant changes by deprivation quintile for breast symptom referrals.

For women aged under 70 there was a statistically significant increase of 7% in the number of urgent GP referrals for suspected breast cancer, from 50,417 to 54,059 referrals ($p < 0.001$). A statistically significant decrease of 12% was seen for breast symptom referrals from 31,782 to 27,919 ($p < 0.001$), resulting in an overall non-significant decrease of 0.3% for combined referrals ($p = 0.585$). In comparison a 5% increase was seen for other suspected cancer referrals ($p < 0.001$). Of those women aged under 70, larger increases in the number of urgent GP referrals for suspected breast cancer were seen for those aged 50-59 (11%) and 60-69 (15%).

Conclusions

There was a statistically significant increase in the number of urgent GP referrals for suspected breast cancer in women aged 70 and over, which appears to be above that of the control group (other suspected cancers). There was a statistically significant increase in the number of breast symptom referrals for women aged 70 to 79, though this appears to be in line with the long-term trend.

The third national campaign appears to have had an impact on the number of urgent GP referrals for suspected breast cancer for women aged 70 and over and may have had some impact on the number of breast symptom referrals for women aged 70 to 79 years.

Other metrics being evaluated include cancer diagnoses resulting from a 2-week wait referral, cancer diagnoses recorded in the Cancer Waiting Times database, number of cancers diagnosed and stage at diagnosis.

Considerations

In general, cancer incidence is increasing which may have an impact on trends over time for this and other metrics, and so the results must be considered with these underlying trends in mind.

Where the results are statistically significant there is some evidence for an impact of the campaign, although underlying trends and other external factors (for example other awareness activities, changing referral guidance) may also affect the results.

Campaigns are more likely to have a greater impact on metrics relating to patient behaviour (for example symptom awareness and GP attendance with relevant symptoms) and use of the healthcare system (for example urgent GP referrals for suspected cancer), compared to disease metrics (for example incidence and stage at diagnosis).

Find out more about Be Clear on Cancer at:

www.ncin.org.uk/be_clear_on_cancer

www.nhs.uk/be-clear-on-cancer/