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Protecting and improving the nation's health

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

Caveats: This summary presents the results of the metric on early stage at diagnosis. 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.

Early stage at diagnosis

The campaign

The third national breast cancer in women over 70 awareness 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 message

There was no evidence to suggest that the third national breast campaign had an impact on the proportion of breast cancers diagnosed at an early stage in women aged 70 years and over; however it may have had an impact in women aged 80 years and over.
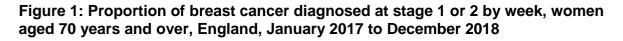
Metric: Early stage at diagnosis

This metric considers whether the third national breast cancer campaign had an impact on the proportion of breast cancers (ICD-10 C50) diagnosed at an early stage of 1 or 2 in women over 70.
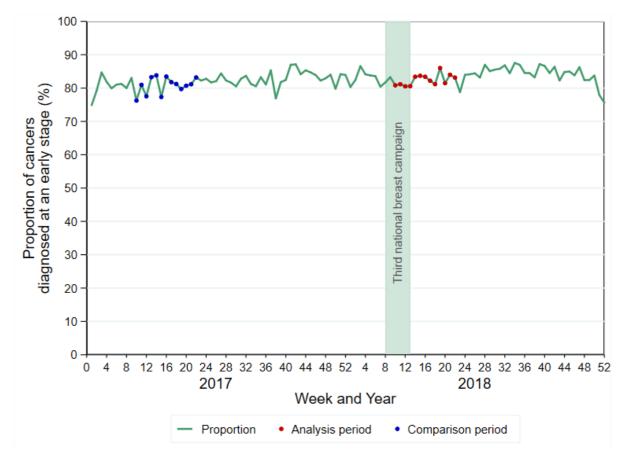
Data was extracted from the national cancer analysis system for the diagnosis period January 2017 to December 2018. The data was grouped into weeks and adjusted to account for bank holidays. Analysis considered the proportion of breast cancers diagnosed in the analysis period compared with the proportion in the same period the year before. The analysis period was defined as two weeks after the start of the campaign (week 10 of 2018) to two months after the end of the campaign (week 22 of 2018). A likelihood ratio test was used to calculate the p-value for statistical significance between the two periods.

Results

Comparing the analysis period to the comparison period, the proportion of early stage breast cancers diagnosed increased by 1.6 percentage points (80.8% in 2017 to 82.4% in 2018) in women aged 70 years and over (Figure 1). This increase was not statistically significant (p=0.065), however there was a statistically significant increase in the proportion of early stage breast cancers diagnosed of 4.0 percentage points (76.8% in 2017 to 80.8% in 2018; p=0.005) for women aged 80 years and over.

Figure 1: Proportion of breast cancer diagnosed at stage 1 or 2 by week, women aged 70 years and over, England, January 2017 to December 2018

Conclusions

There was an increase in the proportion of breast cancers diagnosed at an early stage in women aged 70 years and over. However, this was not statistically significant. There was a statistically significant increase in women aged 80 years and over.

There was no evidence to suggest that the third national breast cancer campaign had an impact on the proportion of breast cancers diagnosed at an early stage in women aged 70 years and over; however it may have had an impact in women aged 80 years and over.

Other metrics being evaluated include GP attendances, urgent GP referrals, conversion and detection rates and emergency presentations.

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