



## **Action Against Heartburn – Before it's too late Charities promoting earlier diagnosis of oesophageal and gastric cancer**

[www.actionagainstheartburn.org.uk](http://www.actionagainstheartburn.org.uk)



**@ActionHeartburn**

13 October 2014

### **PRESS RELEASE**

Charities are supporting the Oesophageal Cancer Westminster Campaign today by attending a rally led by David Heyes MP and a reception hosted by Mike Thornton MP.

The incidence of oesophageal adenocarcinoma, the most common type of oesophageal cancer in the UK, is *rising dramatically, at a rate which exceeds that of any other solid tumour in the western world*. It represents a significant public health and health economic concern.

The Government's strategy on cancer envisaged reducing cancer deaths in England by 5,000 a year by 2014/2015 by achieving European average survival rates. It has also been estimated that 950 lives could be saved each year in the UK if the rate of early diagnosis and outcomes of oesophago-gastric cancer matched the best in Europe.

Early diagnosis makes a great difference in outcomes for this cancer, where there is a precursor condition, Barrett's Oesophagus, with a well-understood symptom of long term persistent heartburn. A person developing Barrett's Oesophagus at age 30 may have an 11 – 25% of developing oesophageal adenocarcinoma by the time they are 80.

Oesophageal cancer 5-year survival for adults in England and Wales is low at 15%. It affects a relatively large number of people (about 8,300 diagnoses a year in the UK, or 2.5% of all cancer cases). The equivalent 5-year survival and incidence figures for other cancers are: breast 87% (50,300); prostate 85% (41,700); stomach 19% (7,100); lung 10% (43,500); pancreatic 3% (8,800). The Cancer Research UK report *Beating Cancer Sooner: Our Research Strategy* includes oesophageal cancer as having substantial unmet need.

Outcomes for oesophageal cancer are worse than some other cancers that appear to receive more public attention. There are opportunities available for improving the situation:

The charities supporting *Action Against Heartburn* are: AUGIS – Association of Upper GI Surgeons; Barrett's Oesophagus Campaign; Barrett's Wessex; Cancer Research UK; CARD – Campaign Against Reflux Disease; CORE – Fighting Gut and Liver Disease; FORT – Fighting Oesophageal Reflux Together; Gutsy Group; Heartburn Cancer UK; Michael Blake Foundation; Oesophagoose -National Oesophago-Gastric Cancer Awareness; OOSO – Oxfordshire Oesophageal and Stomach Organisation; OCHRE charity (Scotland); OPA - Oesophageal Patients Association.

Medical Advisors to *Action Against Heartburn* – Professor Anthony Watson and Professor Mike Pringle

1. Support the Government's *Be Clear on Cancer* campaign on oesophago-gastric cancer that is planned to run on a national basis from 26 January to the end of February 2015.
2. Recognise the importance of Barrett's Oesophagus diagnosis, surveillance and treatment as a long term contributor to reducing deaths from oesophageal adenocarcinoma.
3. Ensure that the right endoscopy resources and training are available to help diagnose Barrett's Oesophagus, adenocarcinoma and other oesophageal conditions.
4. Continue the development of GP diagnostic tools such as cytosponge (the 'sponge on a string').
5. Promote timely referral from GPs for specialist examination for unresolved persistent heartburn and other relevant conditions.
6. Encourage pharmacists to give relevant advice to customers who are purchasing over-the-counter heartburn remedies.
7. Support the UK Barrett's Oesophagus Registry both by funding and by making it easier to obtain patient consent for their records to be used for cancer-related research.
8. Encourage more research for better treatment for oesophageal adenocarcinoma and squamous cell carcinoma.
9. Improve the post treatment quality of life for oesophago-gastric patients, especially in relation to digestion issues after surgery.
10. Open a dialogue with the pharmaceutical industry to improve the labelling on over-the-counter remedies for conditions (eg persistent heartburn) that should be investigated medically for underlying causes.

The Oesophageal Cancer Westminster campaign is chaired by Tim Underwood, a consultant surgeon at Southampton hospital. Email: [T.J.Underwood@soton.ac.uk](mailto:T.J.Underwood@soton.ac.uk)

For further information about Action Against Heartburn, a group of 14 charities promoting earlier diagnosis of oesophageal cancer, contact Alan Moss

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