

PHARMACY



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

www.actionagaintheartburn.org.uk



@ActionHeartburn

Note to Pharmacy staff – How you can help with Oesophageal Cancer Awareness Month

Oesophageal cancer is the sixth most common cause of cancer death in the UK. Each year around 8,700 are diagnosed, and 7,700 die from it. Only 15% of adult patients survive this cancer for five years or more, but outcomes are dramatically improved if the cancer is diagnosed early.

About 70% of UK cases are adenocarcinoma that has been rising eightfold in the last three decades, and the UK has the highest incidence of oesophageal adenocarcinoma (OAC) in the world.

OAC is associated with Barrett's Oesophagus and persistent heartburn. Stomach acid rises past the lower oesophageal sphincter and, over time, can damage the lining of the oesophagus. The cells can gradually change to become more like stomach cells and to protect against the pain of heartburn. This condition is known as Barrett's Oesophagus, a precursor lesion for OAC. The risks of Barrett's Oesophagus developing into cancer are low, but they increase significantly if dysplasia develops.

There are many people with undiagnosed Barrett's Oesophagus, and they are likely to be consumers of over-the-counter heartburn remedies. We therefore encourage pharmacists to help this public health campaign with a number of initiatives:

- *Action Against Heartburn* information leaflets and posters can be displayed on pharmacy premises
- Heartburn remedies, especially proton pump inhibitor medication like *Nexium*, can be located behind the counter to encourage conversation with customers about the reason for their purchase and give opportunities for advice
- Regular customers purchasing heartburn remedies can be asked how long their symptoms have persisted. If persistent, they should be advised to visit their GP. This is consistent with most medication instructions. There is no need for scaring customers unduly about a cancer risk; they may have developed a number of digestion ailments that can be treated.
- Barrett's Oesophagus can be treated by radio frequency ablation that often prevents cancer developing.
- Customer loyalty schemes might be used to pass on an appropriate health message to carefully selected customers through till receipts or other means.

More details are available from www.actionagaintheartburn.org.uk

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The organisations supporting *Action Against Heartburn* are: AUGIS – Association of Upper GI Surgeons; Barrett's Oesophagus Campaign; Barrett's Wessex; BSG – British Society of Gastroenterology; Cancer Research UK; CARD – Campaign Against Reflux Disease; GUTS UK (formerly CORE) – Funding research into diseases of the gut, liver and pancreas; FORT – Fighting Oesophageal Reflux Together; Gutsy Group; Heartburn Cancer UK; Humberside Oesophageal Support Group; Michael Blake Foundation; Oesophagoose -National Oesophago-Gastric Cancer Awareness; OOSO – Oxfordshire Oesophageal and Stomach Organisation; OCHRE charity (Scotland); OG Cancer NI (Northern Ireland); PCSG - Primary Care Society for Gastroenterology; UK Barrett's Oesophagus Registry.
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