

THE BOWEL CANCER SCREENING PROGRAMME: AN OPEN LETTER

An open letter from a local patient

I am writing this letter which will be sent on by your GP because you may have opted NOT to participate in the bowel cancer screening programme. I am a patient – like you.

I recently presented my experience to the local Clinical Commissioning Group and this letter relates that experience, in the hope that it will persuade you to change your mind.

When I was 61, I received an invitation to participate in the programme, which I accepted. The testing kit (which is easy to use) arrived in the post and I sent off my sample. Shortly thereafter, I received a letter which indicated that the sample was abnormal and it was followed up by an appointment for a colonoscopy (internal camera check) at Hemel Hospital at a date and time of my choosing. The letter told me only 10% of samples were abnormal. But only 10% of these abnormal ones ended up needing any further action after the camera check.

I was in the small proportion which fell into that category. The colonoscopy found a tumour which the Doctor estimated to have been present for 6-8 years. I had experienced no symptoms and, without the screening programme, the tumour would not have been detected. The tumour was removed by keyhole surgery and samples of lymph nodes were taken. These showed indicators of cancer, so I received treatment by chemotherapy over the next 6 months.

Over six years later I remain in good health. The various checks (including scans and colonoscopies) have confirmed that I remain free of cancer. I play golf regularly (a perk of retirement) and I enjoy a full and happy life.

My plea to you is that you take up the invitation to join the screening programme, which will involve supplying a sample at 2 year intervals. The chances are that you will be in the 99% who do not have cancer but wouldn't it be good to have that reassurance? And if the programme leads to a diagnosis of cancer, it could save your life, as I believe that it saved mine.

This letter is not something manufactured by the NHS or your local GP; it is a message from my heart!

ONE WHO USED TO HAVE BOWEL CANCER

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