



# News Release

**Monday 3 February 2014**

## **1 IN 3 BREAST CANCERS ARE IN WOMEN OVER 70**

### **New national Be Clear on Cancer campaign targets older women to increase early diagnoses of breast cancer**

One in three women diagnosed with breast cancer in England each year are aged 70 or over<sup>i</sup>. This age group also accounts for more than half of all breast cancer deaths annually, latest figures show<sup>ii</sup>.

This comes as Public Health England launches a new national Be Clear on Cancer campaign to remind older women '*don't assume you're past it*', and to visit their doctor if they spot any changes in their breasts.

Surprisingly, two thirds of women aged 70 and over (67 per cent)<sup>iii</sup> wrongly think women of all ages are equally likely to get breast cancer, when in fact a woman's risk of breast cancer increases with age.

Around 13,500 women aged 70 and over<sup>iv</sup> are diagnosed with breast cancer in England each year, yet survival rates are lower in this age group compared to younger women. Lack of awareness of symptoms other than a lump, such as changes in the shape or size of the breast, is believed to be one of the reasons for this, which the campaign aims to change.

The earlier breast cancer is diagnosed, the higher the chance of survival – more than 90 per cent of all women diagnosed with the earliest stage survive for at least five years. This figure is around 15 per cent for women diagnosed at a late stage<sup>v</sup>.

#### **Dr Yvonne Doyle, Regional Director at Public Health England, said:**

"Research shows that women over 70 have low awareness of breast cancer symptoms, other than a lump. They're also more likely to delay presenting to their GP with breast cancer<sup>vi</sup>, which could ultimately affect their chance of survival.

"One in three women who get breast cancer are over 70<sup>vii</sup>, so don't assume you're past it or dismiss any symptoms as a sign of ageing."

The Be Clear on Cancer campaign will see new national adverts running on TV and in the press from today until 16 March.

**Chief Medical Officer Professor Dame Sally Davies said:**

"I welcome the Be Clear on Cancer campaign as it is crucial in ensuring that women over 70 are aware of the symptoms of breast cancer and are diagnosed early.

"More than 13,000 women over 70 are diagnosed with breast cancer each year, accounting for more than half of all breast cancer deaths. Survival rates from this disease decrease with age; however, awareness of symptoms and risk is low amongst this age group, meaning these women are more likely to be diagnosed at a late stage. The earlier breast cancer is diagnosed, the better the chance of survival."

**Sean Duffy, National Clinical Director at NHS England, said:**

"The fact is women 70 and over are more likely to be diagnosed at a late stage, compared to younger women.

"When we look at other countries such as Sweden, it is clear that we are losing far too many older women to breast cancer. In 2009 it was estimated that around 2,000 deaths from the disease could be avoided each year in England if survival rates matched the best in Europe<sup>viii</sup>.

"Whilst we have made good progress in the last decade, we are still lagging behind our international counterparts. This latest Be Clear on Cancer campaign has an important role to play in helping increase symptom awareness levels, early diagnoses and, ultimately, survival rates."

**Actress Barbara Windsor, 76 years of age, has thrown her support behind the campaign. She said:**

"I met a lot of women affected by breast cancer when I was preparing for Peggy Mitchell's diagnosis in Eastenders, which made me realise just how important an early diagnosis is.

"You get to a certain age and think you're too old for some things, but breast cancer isn't one of them."

**TV and radio presenter Gloria Hunniford, 73 years of age, is supporting the campaign and comments:**

"I know firsthand, having lost my daughter Caron, the impact breast cancer can have on people's lives, and the importance of checking for symptoms.

"The earlier breast cancer is caught, the higher the chances of survival. So know the symptoms, check regularly and visit your doctor if you are concerned. Don't just look out for yourself, you can also play a key role in encouraging those close to you to do the same."

**Actress Miriam Margolyes OBE, who is 72 years of age and also supporting the campaign, said:**

"I have always had big boobs and I want to hang on to them. Surprisingly, one in three women diagnosed with breast cancer are aged 70 or over. My advice - be vigilant and get checked out if you're concerned - it could save your breasts and your life."

**-ENDS-**

#### **Notes to Editor**

1. Public Health England's mission is to protect and improve the nation's health and to address inequalities through working with national and local government, the NHS, industry and the voluntary and community sector. PHE is an operationally autonomous executive agency of the Department of Health. Follow us on Twitter @PHE\_uk
2. Be Clear on Cancer campaigns are run by Public Health England, in partnership with the Department of Health and NHS England.
3. The Be Clear on Cancer breast cancer campaign was piloted in the Midlands from January to March 2013.
4. The Be Clear on Cancer campaign is part of the National Awareness and Early Diagnosis Initiative, run in partnership with Cancer Research UK, to improve England's cancer survival rates.
5. The Government's priorities for cancer as set out in Improving Outcomes: A Strategy for Cancer (January 2011) includes the ambition to save an additional 5,000 lives per year by 2014/15.
6. **TV presenter Cilla Black, 70 years of age, is supporting the new campaign. She commented:**

"It's so important to carry on checking your breasts as you get older because the chance of being diagnosed with breast cancer increases with age. The earlier it's caught the better, so know the symptoms, and don't be afraid to visit your doctor if you are concerned about any potential signs."

7. **Sara Hiom, director of early diagnosis and patient engagement at Cancer Research UK, said:**

"It's worrying to think that some women over 70 may not be aware of their breast cancer risk, or the signs and symptoms of the disease. In fact, the risk of getting breast cancer increases, as you get older. The sooner that breast

cancer is diagnosed, the more likely treatment is to be effective and the chances of beating it are greater – whatever your age.”

**8. Samia al Qadhi, Chief Executive of Breast Cancer Care said:**

“We really welcome this important campaign. So many older women with breast cancer we support tell us they have previously been unaware that breast cancer risk increases with age.

“Our report, Improving outcomes and experiences for older women with breast cancer, and our extensive breast awareness work targeting this group demonstrates that many don’t feel confident about detecting breast changes. The more women we can reach with Be Clear on Cancer, the better.”

**9. Dr Hannah Bridges, Health Information Lead at Breakthrough Breast Cancer, said:**

“Last year Breakthrough Breast Cancer supported a parliamentary inquiry which focused on breast cancer in older people following which nine recommendations were put forward with an aim to improving services specifically for this patient population. One of the key recommendations was a call for steps to improve breast awareness in older women so it is great to see the Be Clear on Cancer campaign being rolled out on a national scale.

“We fully support the recommendations that came out of the inquiry and will continue to work alongside the group to ensure that the necessary changes are implemented as quickly as possible.”

**10. Mia Rosenblatt, Head of Policy and Campaigns at Breast Cancer Campaign, said:**

“It is extremely worrying that the majority of women over 70 are unaware that as they age, their risk of breast cancer continues to increase. It is absolutely vital that these women are properly informed about their risk and the steps they can take to ensure they are breast aware.

“We are delighted, therefore, that the connection between risk of breast cancer and age is being brought to women’s attention through a national campaign and hope that this will result in women over 70 being diagnosed at an earlier stage and lead to improved survival rates.”

**11. Breast cancer facts:**

- Breast cancer is the most common cancer for women in England with around 41,500 women diagnosed each year<sup>x</sup>
- More than 13,500 women aged 70 and over are diagnosed with breast cancer in England each year<sup>x</sup>, and around 5,400 women in this age group die from the disease annually<sup>xi</sup>

12. Possible signs of breast cancer include:

- A lump in your breast or armpit
- Nipple changes
- Changes to the skin of your breast
- Changes in the shape or size of your breast
- Pain in your breast or armpit

For more information on breast cancer in women over 70 please visit [nhs.uk/breastcancer70](http://nhs.uk/breastcancer70)

**Public Health England Press Office**

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<sup>i</sup> Number of cases of female breast cancer (ICD-10: C50) diagnosed in England in 2011 (for age groups, the annual average number of cases between 2009 and 2011 is given). Reference: Data were provided by the Office for National Statistics on request, July 2013. Similar data can be found here: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/vsob1/cancer-statistics-registrations--england--series-mb1-/index.html>

<sup>ii</sup> Number of deaths from breast cancer (ICD-10: C50) in England between 2009 and 2011. Reference: calculated by the Statistical Information Team at Cancer Research UK using data provided by the Office for National Statistics on request, March 2013. Similar data can be found here: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/all-releases.html?definition=tcm%3A77-27475>

<sup>iii</sup> Online adhoc survey conducted among a sample of 1499 females aged 18+ in England between 3-10 December 2013 by TNS BMRB. Quotas were set for PHE region and to be nationally representative by age and social grade. Data was then weighted by region, age and social grade to ensure that it was nationally representative

<sup>iv</sup> Number of cases of female breast cancer (ICD-10: C50) diagnosed in England in 2011 (for age groups, the annual average number of cases between 2009 and 2011 is given). Reference: Data were provided by the Office for National Statistics on request, July 2013. Similar data can be found here: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/vsob1/cancer-statistics-registrations--england--series-mb1-/index.html>

<sup>v</sup> Five-Year Stage-Specific Relative Survival Rates, Adults (Ages 15-99), Anglia Cancer Network 2001-2005, Eastern Cancer Registry and Information Centre (ECRIC). Personal communication. [www.ecric.org.uk](http://www.ecric.org.uk)

<sup>vi</sup> The National Cancer Equality Initiative (NCEI) in March 2010, 'Reducing cancer inequality: evidence, progress and making it happen'

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<sup>viii</sup> <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19956155>

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<sup>xi</sup> Office for National Statistics Mortality Statistics: Deaths registered in 2011, England and Wales 2010, National Statistics: London <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/all-releases.html?definition=tcm%3A77-27475>