

VICTORIA MEDICAL CENTRE

Patient Participation Group Event

"Your Life in Your Hands"

Report of the PPG event held on Wednesday 21 May 2024 in the Group Room at VMC. A panel of speakers discussed how our lifestyle choices and VMC's range of free screening services can save your life, and why early diagnosis is so important.

Dr SUSAN RANKINE	Partner, Victoria Medical Centre
AZIZ PANDOR	Practice Manager and Partner, Victoria Medical Centre
NANCY ALVARES	Advanced Nurse Practitioner, Victoria Medical Centre
MAGDALENE BRZYBYIA	One You Westminster, Stop Smoking Service Manager
ERIN KIRBY	One You Westminster, Referral Generation Manager

PREVENTABLE CANCERS

Magdalene and Erin opened the event by emphasising how important your life-style choices are, from giving up smoking, to losing weight, avoiding junk food, drinking less and keeping fit. One You Westminster has a range of free tailor-made programmes that support residents who want to change their habits by quitting smoking, eating a more healthy diet, doing more exercise and generally living a more healthy life. You can join programmes more than once and the One You team will stand by you until you find the formula that suits you best. You can either self refer for an assessment by ringing One You Westminster on 020 3434 2500, or get a referral from your GP.

DETECTABLE CANCERS

Dr Rankine opened her presentation with some startling statistics. It is a fact that:

1. Half of us are likely to face a cancer diagnosis at some stage in our lives
2. 40 years ago most people in England died from heart attacks and only a minority died from cancer.
3. Today, deaths from heart attacks have greatly reduced but on the other hand deaths from cancer have greatly increased. The ratio is now 50/50 heart attac/cancer.
4. One reason for the reduction in heart attacks is effective medication to control levels of cholesterol, high blood pressure and weight.
5. However, one of the main reason for the increase in cancer deaths is that we are living longer. 40 years ago the average life expectancy was 68, today it is over 80.
6. It is a fact that 400,000 people die from cancer every year in England.

Cancer can remain undetected for years with no symptoms. Abnormal, cancerous cells can divide and multiply stealthily spreading around your body in an uncontrolled way so that when

symptoms finally present themselves, it can be too late for effective life saving treatment—which is why screening is so important. By screening we can detect the disease early on and this gives a much better chance of survival, and early treatment can be much less aggressive.

There are over 200 types of cancer of which four major types: bowel, breast, prostate and lung cancer make up over half the diagnoses. Most of these cancers can be detected early by taking a screening test. When you receive a letter from VMC inviting you to have a screening test, please do not ignore it; it could save your life.

Nancy Alvares, the senior practice nurse, talked about the different kinds of screening tests that are available at VMC on the NHS.

Bowel Cancer is the third most common cancer and takes 40,000 lives a year. Screening tests are offered to everyone aged 60 to 74, and are expanding to include everyone aged 50 to 59 as well. The test currently being offered is a simple home kit called a FIT where you collect a small sample of poo and send it to a lab where it is checked for tiny amounts of blood that may not be seen by the naked eye. If you have any symptoms, such as changes to your normal bowel function, persistent abdominal pain or see blood in your urine at any age, always see a GP, do not wait to have a screening test. Blood can signal polyps in the bowel or bowel cancer.

Over 50,000 women are diagnosed with **Breast Cancer** every year. The NHS invites all women aged between 50 and 71 for screening every 3 years. Screening involves having 2 X-rays of each breast, which is mildly uncomfortable but all over in 10 minutes. It is worth consulting the MacMillan Cancer Helpline before going for your screening. VMC has 1,554 women eligible for breast screening but to date only 722 have opted to attend. If you are over the age of 71 years you can continue to have mammograms every three years but you will have to contact the screening centre as you will no longer get a routine invitation. Every month the surgery receives notification that a patient has been screened and an early breast cancer has been detected and the patient had no symptoms.

Cervical Cancer screening, known as a smear test, is carried out at VMC by specially trained nurses and is offered to all female patients aged 24 to 50 every three years and from 50 to 64 every 5 years. Nearly all cervical cancers are caused by infectious types of human papillomavirus (HPV) and are transmitted by sexual activity. The HPV vaccine given is 97% effective and is offered in schools for young people aged 12 to 13 years. One dose of the vaccine is normally sufficient.

Lung Cancer The NHS does not currently offer a lung cancer screening programme. Prevention rather than Detection is recommended, and that means stopping smoking. There are smoking cessation clinics at VMC every Tuesday and Friday. Symptoms include a persistent cough, coughing up blood, breathlessness, tiredness and weight loss.

Prostate Cancer There is no national screening programme for prostate cancer in the UK because at the moment, there is not a reliable test.

Skin Cancer In answer to a number of questions Dr Rankine confirmed that the UK does not do screening for skin cancer. There are various skin cancers of which melanoma is the most serious. You can reduce your risk of skin cancer by limiting or avoiding exposure to ultraviolet radiation – from sunlight. Checking your skin for suspicious changes can help detect skin

cancer at its earliest stage. A change in the size or colour of moles can be a symptom, as well as whether they are itchy or bleed. Take a photo of a mole and take another one month later to see if there is a change. It is possible for Dr Thakore to look at the lesion through his dermatoscope which can help determine whether or not the lesion is cancerous.

The meeting ended at 7.00 with a number of patients queuing up to make appointments for a screening test.