

ShowCase

Spreading the word about mouth cancer

Topic: Cancer

Organisation: West of Scotland Cancer Awareness Project

Location: West of Scotland

Dates: 2003 to 2004

Budget: £396,000

Contact: Lisa Cohen

Email: lisa@xl-communications.co.uk

Telephone: 0141 571 8608



Image: Paul Hampton - Two Bob Rocket www.twobobrocket.co.uk

Overview

The West of Scotland Cancer Awareness Project was a multi-component, early cancer detection campaign aimed at encouraging at-risk populations living in the West of Scotland to present earlier to the NHS if experiencing the signs and symptoms of oral cancer.

The campaign included: mass media communications; training for professionals (doctors, dentists and pharmacists); improved referral pathways for patients so that access to a clinic was guaranteed within two weeks, with high risk cases usually being seen within a week; additional clinics to meet demand at all the main hospital sites; local community-based open access clinics for a free mouth check; and local health promotion publicity events.

Results:

- The campaign raised awareness of mouth cancer, improved knowledge and understanding of symptoms and encouraged people from a 'hard to reach' audience to see their dentist, doctor or pharmacist if concerned about symptoms
- At rapid access clinics, of 34 patients identified with malignant conditions, 9 were detected as a direct result of the campaign; of 53 patients identified with potentially malignant conditions, 18 were detected as a direct result of the campaign

1. BEHAVIOUR

Primary goal:

- At-risk population to present to the NHS (namely to doctors, dentists and pharmacists) with mouth cancer symptoms

Secondary goals:

- Raise awareness of mouth cancer and the importance of early detection
- Ensure people know what signs and symptoms to look for and what action to take if they find something

2. CUSTOMER ORIENTATION

- Formative research to inform strategic development
- Literature review to examine public awareness, media activity and previous campaigns
- Eight focus groups with the target audience to examine awareness and understanding of mouth cancer
- Creative concepts pretested with six groups of target audience

3. THEORY

- **Health Belief Model:** An individual's willingness to change their health behaviour is based on perceived susceptibility to and severity of the risk, and perceived benefits of and barriers to taking action

4. INSIGHT

- Low spontaneous awareness of mouth cancer
- Low awareness equated with low prevalence – Mouth cancer not seen as a potential threat
- Frontline health professionals seen as a last resort
- Reluctance to confront the issue of cancer
- Power of survivor testimonials to influence target audience
- Hostility to doctors criticising lifestyle choices (e.g. drinking and smoking)
- Dentists not associated with cancer detection

5. EXCHANGE

- **Barriers:** Fear of dentists, doctors and cancer diagnosis; Fatalistic attitudes regarding cancer; Complacency; Reluctance to 'waste' doctor's time; Cost of dental examination; Not registered with a dentist
- **Responses:** Media campaign to improve knowledge of mouth cancer, early detection and survival rates; Use of personal stories from cancer survivors; 'Self referral' system to dentists, GPs or pharmacists for free mouth check, even if not registered with a dentist

6. COMPETITION

- 'Too busy' to go to clinics
- More likely to discuss symptoms with friends, family or co-workers

7. SEGMENTATION

Primary audience:

- Aged 45 and above, particularly men
- Smoke and drink heavily
- Reside in lower socioeconomic areas

Secondary audience:

- Health professionals

8. METHODS MIX

- Communications campaign – TV and radio ads, direct mail, mobile photography exhibition, posters, leaflets, media coverage on TV, radio and press, local events
- Promotional competition
- Training for medical and dental practitioners and pharmacists
- Improved access to health services – Improved referral pathways, additional clinics, financial incentives for dentists