

Promoting earlier diagnosis of brain tumours in children: learning from the project

Key findings

The HeadSmart campaign has been successful in raising awareness of symptomatology of brain tumours in children among doctors seeing children and has raised their confidence in making a diagnosis.

Surveys taken four months after the launch in June 2011 showed 11% of the public were now aware of the campaign.

The clinical champions in cancer units have measured symptom interval (time it takes for a diagnosis) over the past year and it has shown a significant reduction from pre-campaign levels. In addition, the interquartile range has decreased indicating less variation in the symptom interval.

However, the symptom interval was falling before the campaign and other factors, such as the Department of Health National Awareness and Early Diagnosis Initiative, directed at adult cancer diagnosis, may also have had an effect.

Successes

- The campaign received a high degree of media coverage from TV, radio and print media.
- The HeadSmart website has had nearly 47,000 hits since its launch in June 2011.
- Over 300,000 symptoms cards, 12,000 posters and 12,000 leaflets have been distributed.
- Recent discussions in the European Parliament have led to plans to roll out HeadSmart across the European Union.

Challenges

- Rarity of childhood brain tumour means it is hard to make it a priority.
- The team struggled to get support from the Royal College of General Practitioners because of differences between their guidelines and NICE cancer referral guidelines.

- Risk of raising awareness enhancing public anxiety was a concern of some stakeholders.
- Maintaining the engagement of a wide range of stakeholders was a challenge.

Advice to others doing similar projects

- Recruit a wide clinical champion network as early as possible.
- Have discussions with NICE at the earliest stage about possible support.
- Recruit clinical champions in primary care and allied health professionals.
- Patient involvement from the start is valuable and essential to ensure that users are able to set the quality criteria and inform product development.
- Learn from others – the Meningitis Trust campaign was influential in the development of this campaign.