

Campaign aims to be a life-saver

THE number of people in the UK suffering from a condition that causes blindness is expected to rise by a quarter in the next decade, research suggests.

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is the leading cause of sight loss in the Western world yet only half of adults have heard of it.

A poll of more than 4,000 people for the College of Optometrists found a lack of awareness of the condition, with people also unaware that diet and smoking is linked to eye disease.

Research published in the British Journal of Ophthalmology earlier this month predicts cases of AMD in the UK will rise by a quarter by 2020, mostly because people are living longer.

More than 600,000 people suffer from AMD in the UK at present, and 239,000 are estimated to lose their sight due to the condition by the end of this year. By 2020, more than 750,000 people are likely to have the condition, with more than 290,000 losing their sight in that year, according to the predictions.

In the College of Optometrists' survey, only 36% of smokers knew of the link with eye disease and only half of all people were aware a healthy diet can help cut the risk of AMD.

Dr Susan Blakeney, optometric adviser to the college, said: "While AMD is a condition associated with older age, there are steps you can take earlier in life to minimise your risk."

AN awareness campaign which aims to help more men and women spot the symptoms of cancer earlier, is launching in the North East.

The new Be Clear on Cancer campaign, run by the NHS, focuses on the three most common cancers in the UK – breast, bowel and lung cancer.

As well as raising awareness of the symptoms, it aims to increase understanding that the disease is more likely to be treatable the earlier it is diagnosed.

Men and women will have a chance to find out more about the campaign at Tesco and Cancer Research UK's Race for Life events across the region this summer. There will also be information on cervical and ovarian cancer.

Race for Life is the UK's largest women-only fundraising event series and thousands of women across the region are expected to walk, jog or run 5k or 10k to help raise money for Cancer Research UK's life-saving research.

Roy McLachlan, director of the NHS North of England Cancer Network, said: "We are really delighted to be working with Race for Life, which attracted over 31,000 women to events in

Health Reporter HELEN RAE takes a look at a new campaign that is helping people in the North East detect life-saving cancer symptoms as early as possible

the North East and Cumbria last year. Being at the events will give us a unique opportunity to communicate to the public in a very positive way about how to become clearer on cancer."

Research has shown that while the majority of people have been touched by cancer through family and friends, worryingly many are unaware of the symptoms of the disease and may be too embarrassed or frightened to make an appointment with their GP if something appears to be wrong.

Nonnie Crawford, director of public health for the NHS North of England Cancer Network, said: "People in the North of England have access to some of the best cancer services and treatments in the country."

"Despite this, sometimes people are contacting their GP with symptoms of cancer much later than they could.

"We want people to become much more aware of symptoms of the main cancers and to understand that diagnosing cancer at an early stage can make all the dif-



SUPPORT AND ADVICE
Nonnie Crawford, director of public health for the North of England Cancer Network

ference. If people notice any unusual change, it's important for them to see their doctor – it may not be anything to worry about but if it is, getting it diagnosed early means treatment is more likely to be successful, and could save their life."

She added: "More and more

people are surviving cancer thanks to medical advances and NHS screening programmes for breast, bowel and cervical cancers and we want to ensure more people look after their own health so they are able to live life after cancer."

Be Clear on Cancer will use real-life stories to show how being aware of cancer symptoms, and telling your doctor if you think something isn't right, could save your life.

Alternatively, a trip to your GP could simply put your mind at rest, as many symptoms can be linked with other health conditions.

More than one in three people will develop some form of cancer during their lifetime and breast, lung, bowel and prostate cancers together account for over half of all new cancers each year.

Cancer can develop at any age, but is most common in older people. Around three-quarters of cases occur in people aged 60 and over.

Paul Wadsworth, Cancer Research UK spokesperson for

the North East, said: "We've made great progress against cancer, with survival rates doubling over the last 40 years.

"But we often diagnose cancer late in this country so we welcome this campaign to raise awareness of the signs of key cancers and to encourage people to seek help if they notice unusual changes.

"Encouraging people to seek help from their doctor if they suspect cancer is the crucial first step in getting a speedy cancer diagnosis. GPs also need to recognise symptoms and refer for diagnosis appropriately and treatment must follow as quickly as possible.

"We hope this campaign will encourage people to get that little niggle checked out. It could save their life."

The NHS North of England Cancer Network covers a population of over 3 million people across the North East and Cumbria and is made up of health professionals working in cancer care from GPs, nurses, cancer specialists, oncologists and most importantly patients themselves.

■ For information on the NHS North of England Cancer Network, see www.cancernorth.nhs.uk/HelpandSupport



COLD COMFORT
Ivan raises charity cash

COREENA FORD reports on the story of a man who'll do pretty much anything to raise cash for the hospital which saved his son's life.

HE'S done the Great North Run twice and even powered from Cumbria to North Tyneside to raise cash for an all-important charity.

But Ivan Hollingsworth's latest fundraising stunt has shown his daredevil side – quite literally.

The devoted dad is fast-becoming an internet hit across the globe after skiing down a mountain wearing a minuscule tankini – all for the hospital unit which saved his son's life.

His pals dared him to ski 10 kilometres in the skimpy swimsuit for £100 while on holiday in the winter resort of Valloire, France.

Little did they know that Ivan will take on almost any challenge – so long as it raises cash for the Children's Heart Unit at Newcastle's Freeman Hospital, which saved his son Sebastian's life two years ago. So, for £500 he said he'd do it.

Days later, having handed over £500 for the Children's Heart Unit Fund (CHUF), Ivan's friends filmed him zooming down the ski run in the luminous suit made famous by comedy character Borat, in temperatures of minus 5C, watched by some rather bemused skiers.

And footage of the ski stunt has been put on video-sharing website YouTube as well as on Twitter, where it is helping to raise more than £1,100 for CHUF.

The YouTube video has been seen by avid viewers in the US, all over Europe, India, Pakistan, Taiwan, Japan, South Africa, Cyprus, Israel, Lebanon, Oman, United Arab Emirates, Brazil and Kenya since it was put online last week.

Pharmaceutical rep Ivan, 35, a former competitive athlete of Whitley Bay, North Tyneside, said: "It was cold, so I needed one or two warm wines first, but once I got going I was all right.

"I was terrified I was going to get dragged off the piste by the police, and I also had to be careful not to fall over because I would have lost layers of skin.

"When I got to the bottom and saw my wife Nadine and Sebastian I got quite choked up. He and other children are

Ivan bares all on piste for charity

what it's all about." It was back in 2009 that Ivan and his wife Nadine, 34, were told their son was suffering from the congenital heart defect Tetralogy of Fallot when he was just 15 hours old.

A team at the Freeman Hospital carried out life-saving surgery when he was just 16 weeks old and, ever since then, Ivan and Nadine have channelled their efforts into fundraising for CHUF through a fund set up called Seb4Chuf.

Ivan said: "I think my wife knows that if someone is prepared to put money in the charity I will do almost anything – she has a fear of how far I will go.

"We were on holiday in Valloire with friends a couple of weeks ago when one friend bet me £100 I wouldn't ski 10km in a tankini.

"I said 'ni', but that I'd do it for £500. He was back five minutes later with the money. It hung around my neck like a

WOMEN who are too embarrassed or busy to attend smear tests could be helped by home kits to detect early signs of cervical cancer, research suggests.

Scientists found posting a self-sample test to women who had not responded to two previous notifications was more effective than another letter reminding women their examination was due.

They sent human papillomavirus (HPV) detection kits to 1,500 study participants and written notifications to another 1,500.

In the first group, 96 women completed the home test, with eight testing positive for HPV and one woman found to have an invasive cancer. A further 57 were prompted to book a smear appointment with their GP.

Only 68 women in the other group went for cervical screening after getting their third reminder.

Study author Dr Anne Szarewski said: "Women who don't go for cervical screening face a higher risk of cervical cancer, so it's important to encourage these women to take part.

"Home testing for HPV is as accurate as samples taken by doctors and can help address some of the reasons, like finding time or being embarrassed, that women often give as reasons for not attending screening."

LIFE expectancy in Europe is increasing despite the obesity epidemic, with people in Britain living longer than those in the US, an analysis of trends over the last 40 years suggests.

The findings published in the International Journal of Epidemiology appear to mitigate concerns that rising life expectancy in high income countries may falter in the face of obesity-related health problems.

Epidemiologist and population health expert Prof David Leon, of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, concluded that in the last five years, most European countries have been going in a

"positive direction" for the first time in decades.

Prof Leon said: "Despite what many may have assumed, and without being complacent, current trends in European life expectancy are in a positive direction.

"But while the European experience since 1980 underlines the centrality of the social, political and economic determinants of health, many intriguing and important questions remain unanswered about the drivers of these extraordinary trends."

He said UK deaths from cardiovascular disease had seen "some of the largest and most rapid falls of any Western European country".

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NEARLY 200 applications have been received to register products in time for a new law aimed at protecting consumers from potentially damaging herbal medicines, according to the drug safety watchdog.
The Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) said there had been 198 applications for approval as part of the traditional herbal medicine registration scheme with 99 granted so far and the remainder under consideration.
Under a European directive due to take effect on April 30, herbal medicines on sale in shops will have to be registered with the scheme.
Products will be required to be licensed and fulfil safety, quality and manufacturing standards as well as providing a patient information leaflet outlining areas such as possible side effects.
Commonly used ingredients already registered include echinacea, used against colds, St John's Wort, used by some for depression and anxiety, and Valerian, claimed as a natural remedy for insomnia.
Research conducted for the MHRA carried out in 2009 has shown 26% of UK adults have taken a herbal medicine in the past two years.
The agency has said it is hoping to promote a more cautious approach to using herbal medicines after the research findings showed that more than a half of people, 58%, believed the products were safe because they were natural.
NINE out of 10 GPs now believe self care by patients has an important role in general practice.
TNS Kantar research in 2009 found 78% of patients claimed self care was not discussed in their GP consultation. However, new research by doctors.net.uk for OTC Bulletin shows eight out of 10 GPs will now encourage self care in the future.

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