

Deaf Community Gut Health / Bowel Cancer Workshop



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Introduction

Background

Affecting the colon and rectum, bowel cancer is a type of cancer found in the large bowel and is among the most prevalent cancers in the UK. In the UK, bowel cancer ranks as the fourth most common cancer, with nearly 44,000 new diagnoses annually. While it's more common in those over 50 (94% of new cases), over 2,600 younger individuals also receive this diagnosis each year. Lifetime risk stands at 1 in 17 for men and 1 in 20 for women.

Deaf individuals with bowel cancer are often diagnosed at stage 4, and many decline chemotherapy, potentially due to comprehension barriers or anxiety. 48% of Deaf individuals face a significantly higher risk of developing serious health conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, and certain cancers. In contrast, people experiencing hearing loss show a greater likelihood (11% higher) of participating in cancer screenings compared to those without any physical disabilities.

Objectives

The workshop aimed to:

- Increase the Deaf community's knowledge about gut health and bowel cancer, including risk factors, symptoms, and the importance of early detection.
- Make information about gut health and bowel cancer accessible in British Sign Language (BSL) and other appropriate formats.

- Raise awareness about bowel cancer screening programmes available in the UK and encourage participation.
- Understand the specific barriers the Deaf community may face in accessing information and services related to gut health and bowel cancer.
- Gain insight into the existing knowledge and awareness levels within the Deaf community regarding gut health and bowel cancer.

Key Findings

Language and Communication Barriers

- For a significant portion of the Deaf community, the English language itself presents an obstacle in accessing and comprehending health-related information, hindering their ability to fully engage with materials about bowel cancer and gut health.
- The complexity and verbosity often found in written health resources, such as leaflets and brochures, can make them difficult for Deaf individuals to understand, creating a need for information presented in a more accessible format.
- The absence of British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters at healthcare appointments and within health information materials poses a significant barrier, limiting effective communication and understanding between Deaf individuals and healthcare providers.

Accessibility of Information Barriers

- Overall, there is a lack of readily available and easily accessible information tailored to the specific needs of the Deaf community, which contributes to disparities in health knowledge.
- While much of the current health information is found online, a segment of the Deaf community faces challenges due to limited digital literacy or access, making it difficult for them to independently seek out and obtain crucial details about bowel cancer and gut health.
- Many individuals within the Deaf community lack adequate support systems to assist them in interpreting and fully understanding

complex health information, which can lead to confusion and disengagement.

Concerns about Screening Barriers

- Some individuals expressed reservations about participating in bowel cancer screening due to the nature of the screening kit itself, finding the process unpleasant or off-putting.
- There are anxieties and concerns among some regarding the practicalities of handling and returning samples through the postal system, adding another layer of complexity to the screening process.

Knowledge

- It's evident that there's a variation in existing knowledge about bowel cancer and screening within the Deaf community, with some individuals reporting that they had never encountered this information prior to the workshop.
- When seeking health-related information, Deaf individuals commonly rely on sources such as GP's, posters displayed in clinics or hospitals, and printed leaflets or brochures.
- The workshop highlighted the importance of accessible learning environments, with participants emphasizing the crucial role of BSL interpreters in facilitating comprehension and engagement with health information.
- Participants found the workshop particularly beneficial in providing practical guidance and instruction on how to correctly utilise the bowel cancer screening kit, increasing their confidence in participating in the screening process.

Recommendations

Improving Information Formats

- To enhance access to digital information, the use of QR codes was suggested as a valuable tool for quickly linking individuals to relevant online resources.
- The community strongly favours the use of video formats that incorporate BSL interpreters, as this is considered more effective in conveying information clearly and accurately.

Enhancing Communication

The consistent provision of BSL interpreters is essential to ensure effective communication and understanding of health information within the Deaf community, bridging the gap between healthcare providers and Deaf individuals.

Considering Social Media Usage

- It's important to acknowledge that social media is not a universally adopted platform, with some individuals expressing a preference for alternative methods of communication and information distribution.
- When utilising social media to share health information, it is crucial to employ concise language and avoid overly complex wording.

"It is vital for the deaf community to engage with cancer screening and having them done as early prevention can save lives. The workshop shows how important it is to raise awareness,

in their first language, British Sign Language, to ensure they understand why it is important to attend these workshops and screening appointments. Many deaf members of the community struggle to read and understand information and so are unable to ask questions due to the language barriers.” **Holly Woodfield (Newham Deaf Community Outreach Worker)**

Conclusion

The workshop highlighted a significant need for accessible and culturally sensitive information and resources regarding gut health and bowel cancer within the Deaf community. While workshops with BSL interpreters are highly valued and effective, there are ongoing barriers related to language, digital access, and concerns about screening that need to be addressed to ensure equitable health outcomes.

Next Steps

Increase Digital Inclusion

Create more health information materials in BSL, including videos and easily understandable written formats, to improve comprehension and engagement.

Increase Digital Inclusion

Provide digital literacy training and support to enhance the Deaf community's ability to access online health information.

Address Screening Concerns

Develop resources that specifically address concerns and anxieties about bowel cancer screening, potentially using testimonials or visual aids to explain the process clearly.

Train Healthcare Providers

Educate healthcare professionals on effective communication strategies for interacting with Deaf patients, emphasising the importance of BSL interpreters and cultural sensitivity.

Further Community Engagement

Continue conducting workshops and outreach programs in the Deaf community to provide ongoing education and gather feedback for improving health services.



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