

Action Cancer: The Big Bus mobile unit

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Background: Action Cancer, a non-profit organisation established in 1973 has a mission '*to save lives and support people affected by cancer in Northern Ireland*'. The organisation focuses on the prevention of cancer, early detection of cancer and the provision of support services for cancer patients and their families, while also providing funding for high quality local cancer research. Within the past year, working in partnership with SuperValu, the organisation launched the BIG BUS service, the first of its type in Europe. The aim of this abstract is to describe the unit and report on some initial findings from evaluations.

Material and methods: An 18 metre-long articulated vehicle with expanding side pods was used to house digital screening (with satellite transmission of images), cancer prevention and support services for men and women and is fully accessible for people with disabilities. The Big Bus, launched in September 2006, targets areas in Northern Ireland where cancer risk is greatest and where uptake of screening services is low. Available across all health boards in Northern Ireland, the unit is available for workplaces, organisations and the public through an appointment system. An evaluation form, recording general demographic information and satisfaction with services, was completed by those who accessed the unit.

Results: There are 24 breast screening, 12 health check, 4 complementary therapy and 4 listening ear appointments on an operational day. In the period September 2006 – March 2007, a total of 1910 people have accessed the services over 100 operational days; 1160 for breast screening, 637 for health checks, 76 for complementary therapy and 37 for listening ear. Of those 72% are female (mean age 46yrs±9.5yrs) and 28% male (mean age 42yrs±12.6yrs). A large proportion (41%) of those using the breast screening services reported that they would not have attended any other premises to access screening and 56.5% of those using the health check service would not have attended anywhere else for the same health check.

Conclusions: The use of the Big Bus for the provision of services in high risk areas is a successful way to engage with the population. With approximately half of those using the mobile services reporting that they would not have attended anywhere else to access the same services, it is imperative to note the importance of bringing these services to people.