

ACTION CANCER: SPECIAL CLINICS FOR INCREASING BREAST SCREENING UPTAKE.

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ABSTRACT: Background

Action Cancer, a charitable organisation in Northern Ireland who provides free, high quality breast cancer screening services to women who fall outside eligibility for the National Health Service Breast Screening Program (NHSBSP), has developed a special programme of clinics. These 'Special Clinics' are specifically aimed at groups of women who experience barriers to accessing standard breast-screening services. These Special Clinics started as a two-year pilot scheme in 2004, and, following an evaluation highlighting its success, funding was secured from the Women's Resource Development Agency (WRDA) to ensure continued Special Clinic provision four times a month.

Objectives

The overall objective of the Special Clinics evaluation is to examine the usefulness of these clinics for increasing breast screening in women with barriers for standard screening services.

Methods

Each Special Clinic caters for a small number of women (maximum of 12 depending on the needs of the group) so appropriate individual attention can be given. Clinics are pre-booked by specific organisations and all provisions are made to ensure the successful uptake in screening, e.g. transport, interpreters etc. In addition to the provision of screening opportunities, the clinic also includes a healthy lifestyle talk, a complementary therapy (CT) session and refreshments (tea, coffee and sandwiches) to ensure a relaxed environment is experienced. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to evaluate the special clinics. Following the pilot project, interviews with selected special clinic participants and partnership members were carried out. In addition, those attending the special clinics completed custom designed evaluation questionnaires after attendance at the clinic.

Results

To date 62 special clinics have occurred. Although the groups using the service were predominantly from the learning disability category (53%), many other groups utilised the service: elderly (24%), ethnic minorities (11%), physical disabilities (5%), mental health (3%), rural (2%) and socially deprived (2%). In total 409 women, aged 40-80yrs of age (mean age = 57yrs±12yrs), attended the special clinics and 90% of these women had mammography successfully. Of those attending the special clinics 56% had previously been called for screening through the NHSBSP programme, but there was a reported average of 4yrs since their last screening (minimum 1yr, maximum 10yrs). From the women screened at the special clinics, 41 were referred for further investigations and two received a confirmed diagnosis of cancer. Interview data highlighted that many women felt that breast screening would never have taken place at all were it not for this clinic. Also, the provision of the healthy lifestyle talk, CT and refreshments were highlighted as factors

that helped women to feel comfortable enough to agree to screening. Findings from the evaluation questionnaires highlighted that the most common barrier to attendance for screening was transport (50%).

Conclusions

The success of these clinics is highlighted by the high uptake of screening. The detection of cancer emphasises further the importance of providing special clinics to ensure women with barriers to standard screening services still have the opportunity to access these vital detection services.



Conflict of Interest: None declared