

PRESS RELEASE

Tuesday 4 November 2014

SWALLOWING A SPONGE ON A STRING COULD REPLACE ENDOSCOPY AS PRE-CANCER TEST

SWALLOWING a sponge on a string could replace traditional endoscopy as an equally effective but less invasive way of diagnosing a condition that can be a forerunner of oesophageal cancer.

The results of a Cancer Research UK trial involving more than 1,000 people are being presented today (Tuesday) at the National Cancer Research Institute's annual conference in Liverpool.

The trial invited more than 600 patients with Barrett's Oesophagus – a condition that can sometimes lead to oesophageal cancer – to swallow the Cytosponge and to undergo an endoscopy. Almost 500 more people with symptoms like reflux and persistent heartburn did the same tests.

The Cytosponge proved to be a very accurate way of diagnosing Barrett's Oesophagus. More than 94 per cent of people swallowed the sponge and reported no serious side effects. Patients who were not sedated for endoscopy were more likely to rate the Cytosponge as a preferable experience.

Lead author Professor Rebecca Fitzgerald, based at the MRC Cancer Unit at the University of Cambridge, said: "The Cytosponge test is safe, acceptable and has very good accuracy for diagnosing Barrett's Oesophagus. It should be considered as an alternative to endoscopy for diagnosing the condition and could possibly be used as a screening test in primary care."

Barrett's Oesophagus is caused by acid coming back up the food pipe from the stomach - known as acid reflux - which can cause symptoms like indigestion and heartburn.

Over time people with these symptoms may develop changes in the cells that line the oesophagus. These cells can become cancerous and so patients with Barrett's Oesophagus are tested every couple of years.

Barrett's Oesophagus is usually diagnosed by having a biopsy during an endoscopy. This can be uncomfortable and carries some risks - and it's not always practical for everyone who has symptoms like reflux and heartburn.

Oesophageal cancer is the thirteenth most common cancer in the UK. Around 5,600 men develop the disease each year compared with 2,750 women. And each year around 5,200 men and 2,460 women die from the disease.

Dr Julie Sharp, Cancer Research UK's head of health information, said: "These results are very encouraging and it will be good news if such a simple and cheap test can replace endoscopy for Barrett's oesophagus.

"Death rates are unacceptably high in oesophageal cancer so early diagnosis is vital. Tackling oesophageal cancer is a priority for Cancer Research UK and research such as this will help doctors to diagnose people who are at risk quickly and easily."

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For press enquiries contact the NCRI press office on 0151 707 4642/3/4/5, or out of hours contact the duty press officer on 07050 264 059.

Notes to editors

Read the full abstract -

<http://conference.ncri.org.uk/abstracts/2014/abstracts/clinicalshowcase04.html>

About the NCRI

- The National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) is a UK-wide partnership between the government, charity and industry. Its role is to promote cooperation in cancer research.
- NCRI Partners are: the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI); Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council; Breakthrough Breast Cancer; Breast Cancer Campaign; Cancer Research UK; Children with Cancer UK; Department of Health; Economic and Social Research Council; Leukaemia & Lymphoma Research; Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research; Macmillan Cancer Support; Marie Curie Cancer Care; Medical Research Council; Northern Ireland Health and Social Care (Research & Development Office); Prostate Cancer UK; Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation; Scottish Government Health and Social Care Directorates (Chief Scientist Office); Tenovus; Welsh Government (National Institute for Social Care and Health Research); Worldwide Cancer Research (formerly the Association for International Cancer Research); Wellcome Trust; and Yorkshire Cancer Research.
- For more information visit www.ncri.org.uk

About the NCRI Cancer Conference

- The National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) Cancer Conference is the UK's major forum for showcasing the best British and international cancer research.
- The Conference offers unique opportunities for networking and sharing knowledge by bringing together world-leading experts from all cancer research disciplines.
- The tenth NCRI Cancer Conference is taking place from 2–5 November 2014 at the BT Convention Centre in Liverpool.
- For more information visit conference.ncri.org.uk

About Cancer Research UK

- Cancer Research UK is the world's leading cancer charity dedicated to saving lives through research.
- Cancer Research UK's pioneering work into the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of cancer has helped save millions of lives.
- Cancer Research UK receives no government funding for its life-saving research. Every step it makes towards beating cancer relies on every pound donated.
- Cancer Research UK has been at the heart of the progress that has already seen survival rates in the UK double in the last forty years.
- Today, 2 in 4 people survive cancer. Cancer Research UK's ambition is to accelerate progress so that 3 in 4 people will survive cancer within the next 20 years.



- Cancer Research UK supports research into all aspects of cancer through the work of over 4,000 scientists, doctors and nurses.
- Together with its partners and supporters, Cancer Research UK's vision is to bring forward the day when all cancers are cured.

For further information about Cancer Research UK's work or to find out how to support the charity, please call 0300 123 1022 or visit www.cancerresearchuk.org. Follow us on Twitter and Facebook.