

OESOPHAGEAL CANCER



BEHIND THE BURN

Oesophageal is one of the most lethal cancers – awareness of symptoms is dangerously low for these killers despite early diagnosis being key for the best chance of survival.

DID YOU KNOW...

- Only two per cent of people can correctly identify the main oesophageal cancer symptoms? Do your patients know them?
- Excessive heartburn or indigestion for three weeks or more
 - Difficulty or pain in swallowing food
 - Persistent hiccups and / or ongoing weight loss

The best advice to give individuals is to take action and see their GP for reassurance or treatment.

HEARTBURN ISN'T ALWAYS HARMLESS

Heartburn Cancer UK was set up by Mimi McCord in 2003, following the tragic death of her husband, Michael, from oesophageal cancer. Michael died in 2002 at just 47 years old. He had been experiencing heartburn for a number of years and antacids had been a regular item in the family shopping basket each week. It was only when Michael was struggling to swallow his toast one Saturday morning that his wife, Mimi, suggested he speak with the doctor. He was referred to a gastroenterologist, sent for an endoscopy, and diagnosed with cancer. Michael died, at home, just nine weeks later.

His devastating and untimely death, like many others, may have been prevented if he had known about the dangers of persistent heartburn and its link to oesophageal cancer.

Heartburn Cancer UK is delighted to be celebrating 20 years as a charity in 2023, with Mimi just as passionate about raising awareness and helping to save lives today as she was 20 years ago.

Around 8,000 people die in the UK every year from oesophageal cancer, that's 22 deaths every day. It's the seventh biggest cancer killer, with an appalling prognosis of only 15 per cent of patients surviving for five years. It's also the fourth most common cause of cancer death in males. Currently, 70 per cent of cases are discovered too late for

curative treatment. The most common early symptom is persistent heartburn – with your help we can change this.

AWARENESS AND SUPPORT

This seemingly harmless symptom is often treated with over-the-counter remedies because people are unaware of the risks. Our mission is to raise public awareness of the dangers of ignoring persistent heartburn and to urge people to seek advice from their GP. If your patient's heartburn is persistent and happens most days for three weeks or more, they should be encouraged to get it checked.

Heartburn Cancer UK also provides information and support to patients and their families living with reflux, Barrett's oesophagus (a pre-cancerous condition) and oesophageal cancer, and we support research to help increase early diagnosis, improve patient outcomes and ultimately, help save lives.



Mimi and her family

EARLY DIAGNOSIS: THE CYTOSPONGE™

Mimi tells us, 'The key to challenging these appalling stats is early diagnosis. We are currently partnered in a pilot project which introduces an innovative screening test, the Cytosponge™, into primary care, initially in East Anglia, Essex and Suffolk where the project will screen 1,500 at-risk patients with the use of a mobile diagnostic unit supplied by Heartburn Cancer UK. There are more encouraging projects planned for 2023 too.'

The Cytosponge™ is a small capsule on a strong thread. After swallowing, the capsule coating (vegetarian gelatine) dissolves in the stomach to release a small sponge which, when removed by a nurse, allows a cell collection from the lining of the oesophagus (gullet or food-pipe). These cells are then analysed for abnormalities that might signal Barrett's, a pre-cancerous condition, or cancer.

Currently these conditions are diagnosed by expensive / invasive endoscopy so the Cytosponge™ could be a real game-changer for triage, surveillance and case-finding. NHS Scotland has already introduced the Cytosponge™ and it's hoped that England, Wales and Northern Ireland won't be far behind.

Mimi adds, 'The Cytosponge™ is 50 per cent less costly than the current hospital-based alternative, the endoscopy, and has been shown to identify 10 times as many cases of concern as current primary routine care. It is our aim to help introduce a wider screening service, in a variety of geographical areas, bringing access to this potentially life-saving test to as many people as we can and raising awareness as we go.'



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MORE INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

To help the charity celebrate their 20 years and continue its vital work, there are lots of ways we could work together to help make a difference. Please get in touch if you would like more information on:

- Anything covered in this feature
- Accessing information to promote symptoms and raise awareness i.e. posters, leaflets or pockets size information cards
- Assets to share on social media or websites
- Support groups for Barrett's or oesophageal cancer patients or working together to set one up in your area
- Our mobile unit
- Further information on the Cytosponge™ and helping patients to access it where available
- Helping us to raise funds

Mimi finishes by saying, 'After 20 years seeing no change in earlier diagnosis, the Cytosponge™ could really make a difference. We want to continue to support its journey into everyday care in any way we can. If individuals have persistent heartburn, getting checked by their doctor will help give them peace of mind or put them on the path to a far better prognosis if there is a problem.'

For more information, visit www.heartburncanceruk.org or contact info@heartburncanceruk.org.



Mimi is continuing to spread awareness