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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH HEPATITIS C AWARENESS CAMPAIGN UPDATE - JANUARY 2009

New look to hepatitis C campaign launched

2009 will see the relaunch of the Department of Health's hepatitis C awareness campaign to help improve the detection and diagnosis of the virus, as there is effective treatment available to prevent progression to serious liver disease.

Formerly called 'Face It', the new campaign will place a greater focus on reaching groups at increased risk of infection, such as former dependent or non-dependent intravenous drug users and people from a South Asian background, following in-depth research on these audience groups.

The campaign will continue to raise awareness among healthcare professionals and the general public. (Current injecting drug users are the subject of a separate campaign commissioned by the National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse www.harmreductionworks.org.uk).

An awareness campaign targeting healthcare professionals, focusing on GPs and practice nurses will run from mid-January. The campaign will comprise news items, articles and adverts in the healthcare professional media and the creation of a new awareness video involving real patient case studies, hosted on NHS Choices.

This will come ahead of a launch towards the end of January involving the release of new data on the public's knowledge and understanding of hepatitis C.

The Department will also be refreshing its suite of resources on hepatitis C for healthcare professionals producing new patient information leaflets for surgeries, waiting areas, and for dissemination directly to patients. This complements the other resources available to health professionals, which include a quick reference guide to the virus and more detailed medical guidance. All the resources, plus further information and best practice examples, will be available on a dedicated webpage later this month on www.nhs.uk/hepc.

The public campaign will encourage individuals to think about the experiences they have had in their life, with the aim of prompting them to self-assess whether they could have been exposed to the virus.

A national advertising campaign throughout February and March will focus on a 'have you ever' nostalgia theme with engaging visuals of parties, clubs and pubs and foreign travel.

The campaign will run in national, regional and local newspapers, on regional radio stations and in nightclubs and pubs throughout England.



The South Asian awareness activity which runs from February to March will involve a bespoke campaign in the ethnic media, an engagement programme to community centres, places of worship and healthcare professionals in key areas. There is also a separate advertising campaign involving TV, press and radio advertising, and TV phone ins.

Although diagnoses of hepatitis C have been increasing since the Department's Hepatitis C Action Plan for England was published in 2004, it is estimated that there could be approximately 100,000 people with undiagnosed chronic hepatitis C in the UK. If left undiagnosed and untreated, hepatitis C can lead to cirrhosis, primary liver cancer or the need for liver transplantation.

As few people with the virus show symptoms of infection for many years, healthcare professionals have a key role to play in helping identify patients who might be at risk. If



diagnosed, there is effective drug therapy available that can eliminate the virus on average in more than half of patients who are treated.

The campaign is supported by a website for healthcare professionals and the public at www.nhs.uk/hepc and the Hepatitis C Information Line (0800 451 451).

