

# The AAA Team

Newsletter of the Northern Ireland AAA Screening Programme



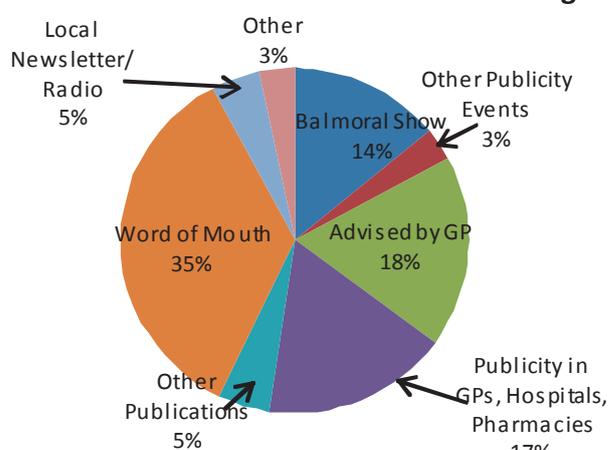
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## Self-Referrals - How You can Help...

Since the Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm (AAA) Screening Programme started in June 2012, we have had over 750 men self-refer to the programme, almost 5% of the total men we have screened to date (just over 16,500). Many of these (35%) were as a direct result of support from GPs and other health professionals - men were either advised by their GP to contact the programme or they contacted us after seeing a poster in the GP surgery / hospital / pharmacy.

The chart shows some other ways men have heard of the programme. In January this year, the AAA Screening Programme was delighted when a GP used a section from the previous edition of this newsletter to promote our programme. The GP surgery sent a letter, together with the front cover of the newsletter, to all men registered with the surgery who were over 65 and therefore eligible to be screened by the programme. This generated telephone calls to the programme from almost 100 men requesting screening.

**How self-referrals heard of AAA Screening**



The self-referral process for all men over 65 is straightforward. The man contacts the **Programme Office** on **02890 631828** where he will be asked for his name, address, telephone number, date of birth and name of GP surgery. The man's details will then be checked against those recorded on the Business Services Organisation's system, HCN Web View. Once verified, these are entered to the Screening Programme's system and the man is sent an appointment, usually within four to six weeks.

To date, we have had 14 men who have self-referred into the programme and have subsequently had an AAA detected. Depending on the size of the aneurysm, all of these men are either now under regular surveillance by the programme - to monitor the size of the AAA - or else they have been referred to the specialist Vascular Team within the Royal Victoria Hospital for treatment (usually open surgery or EVAR).

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your ongoing support. If you are interested in promoting the programme, and would like to look at the possibility of running a clinic in your local area for men registered to your GP surgery, please contact the **Screening Programme Manager, Diane Stewart** on **02890 638256** or [diane.stewart@belfasttrust.hscni.net](mailto:diane.stewart@belfasttrust.hscni.net)

### Key contacts: Belfast H&SC Trust

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**Programme Mgr:** Ms Diane Stewart, 02890 638256

**Programme Office:** 02890 631828

### Key contacts: PHA

**Public Health Lead:** Dr Adrian Mairs, 02890 311611

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Mrs Jacqueline McDevitt, 02890 311611

**Admin Assistant:** Ms Helen McCann, 02890 311611

## Annual AAA Screening Men's Event : March 2014

This year, the second Men's AAA Screening Event was held on Thursday 27th March in the Grosvenor Hall at Belfast Central Mission. The event was organised and facilitated by all members of the NI AAA Screening Programme Team based both at the Public Health Agency and at the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. The aim of the event was to bring together men screen-detected with an AAA - plus their wives or partners - and programme staff to facilitate discussions about current screening provision and treatment. Participants were also asked to consider potential areas for development and improvement and, as per the previous year's event, talk about the following:

- **What is good about the programme?**
- **What could be improved?**
- **What has been my own experience of AAA screening?**

Those men who had been referred for surgery were, in addition, invited to provide feedback on two post-operative leaflets covering both EVAR (stent) and open-repair surgery (designed to address some of the key areas highlighted as requiring improvement at the 2013 event).

Men and their companions were further provided with information about the programme's commitment to personal and public involvement (PPI) and given the opportunity to engage in a variety of ways with the programme to help shape future development and on-going improvement.

Fifty-six individuals attended the event, including 22 men and 9 of their wives/partners - double the number from the inaugural event. The chart below summarises the responses of men and their wives/companions to the event itself, which was considered very worthwhile.

|  | <b>Strongly Agree</b> | <b>Agree</b> | <b>Not Sure</b> | <b>Total*</b>   |
|--|-----------------------|--------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| <i>The event was relevant to my needs</i>          | <b>89%</b>            | <b>7%</b>    | <b>4%</b>       | 27              |
| <i>The programme was well structured</i>           | <b>100%</b>           | -            | -               | 27              |
| <i>The information provided was helpful</i>        | <b>96%</b>            | <b>4%</b>    | -               | 27              |
| <i>The organisation of the event was efficient</i> | <b>96%</b>            | <b>4%</b>    | -               | 27              |
| <i>I would consider attending similar events</i>   | <b>89%</b>            | <b>7%</b>    | <b>4%</b>       | 27              |
| <i>I would welcome a support group</i>             | <b>77%</b>            | <b>15%</b>   | <b>8%</b>       | 26 <sup>#</sup> |

# 27 forms returned out of possible 31

\* this question not completed in 1 returned form

Finally, key areas from this year's event for development and improvement include:

- **Additional information on post-operative recovery and what to expect before surgery**
- **Being advised of the size of a small or medium AAA**
- **Being reminded of the opportunity to meet with the Vascular Nurse Specialist after an AAA is detected**
- **Raising awareness of the programme further amongst GPs and the wider population**
- **More promotion of the programme generally i.e. in shops, churches, through Men's Groups, texting appointments, through Facebook and the use of social media**

**Calling all GPs! Don't forget SELF-REFERRAL...**

Men over 65, who have never attended for AAA Screening, can ask to be screened by contacting the Programme Office on: **02890 631828**



## Real Life Screening Experiences

Mr Raymond Conroy (pictured right), who is retired and lives in Enniskillen, had no worries about his health when he received the letter from the AAA Screening Programme inviting him to go along for a quick, free scan. As Raymond explains: "I received the letter to attend the screening at the South West Acute Hospital. I had never thought about aortic aneurysms before or that I could possibly have one, but I thought why not?" Raymond was shown into the clinic room where the procedure was explained to him. The test was simple and pain-free.

The scan detected that Raymond had a small aortic aneurysm. As most AAAs grow very slowly men with a small or medium AAA may never develop a large AAA but will be monitored to see if it grows. Raymond continues: "Immediately after the scan I was told by the technician that I had a small aortic aneurysm. She gave me an information leaflet and said at this stage I only needed to be monitored. They also notified my GP with the results of the scan. I was reassured that at least now I know about the aneurysm and that it will be monitored to help



Mr Raymond Conroy and Ms Diane Stewart, Programme Manager, at the 2014 Men's AAA Screening Event in Belfast Central Mission

prevent it becoming fatal. I had never heard of AAA screening before this, but I would strongly advise any men who are invited to have a scan to go for it."

Similarly, Mr Herbert McMullan (pictured left) from Downpatrick knows all too well how vital this health check is.

Herbert is retired and had no worries about his health when he received the letter from the Northern Ireland AAA Screening Programme inviting him to go along for screening.

Herbert explains: "Last May I received a letter to attend screening at Downe Hospital. I felt well and had no reason to worry and I didn't even know what an abdominal aortic aneurysm was or that I might maybe have one, but I went along."

Herbert was shocked when a small aneurysm was found; however he is happy with his follow-up care. "I was scanned again and twelve months on nothing has changed, so I have peace of mind."



Mr Herbert McMullan and Ms Roisin Monan, Deputy Programme Manager, at the 2014 Men's AAA Screening Event

As a result of his own experience Herbert is without hesitation in advising other men to attend Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm screening.

## Data Report

### 2013 / 2014 Data

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| <b>Uptake rate:</b>                     | <b>82%</b> |
| <b>Screen detected AAAs:</b>            | <b>106</b> |
| <b>Large AAAs referred for surgery:</b> | <b>13</b>  |

The screening year ran from 1/4/2013 to 31/3/2014. All men in Northern Ireland who turned 65 during this time were offered an initial screening appointment by the end of March 2014 (9,415 men). During the year 448 men who have self-referred were screened.

### Overall Data

**(since programme started in June 2012)**

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| <b>Uptake rate:</b>                     | <b>83%</b> |
| <b>Screen detected AAAs:</b>            | <b>262</b> |
| <b>Large AAAs referred for surgery:</b> | <b>30</b>  |

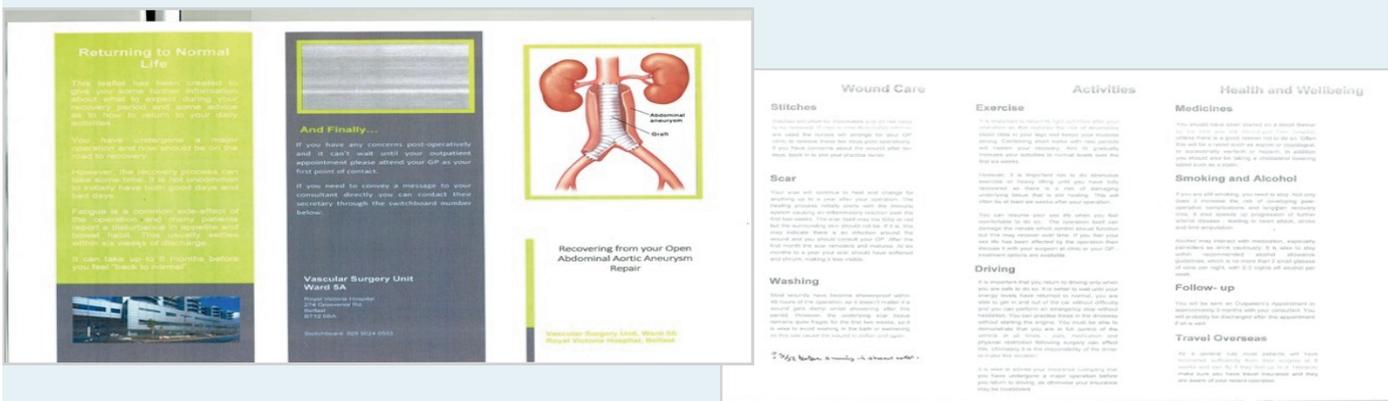
Since screening began in 2012, 769 men have self-referred while the overall prevalence rate sits at 1.6%

## New Patient Discharge Leaflet for Men post - AAA Surgery

Following feedback from men who have had an AAA detected, work is ongoing within the Belfast Trust to develop a leaflet designed specifically for men who have had treatment for a large aneurysm. Separate leaflets have been developed for men who have undergone open surgery and for those who have had an EVAR.

These leaflets are currently being tested and we hope to have them available within the next few weeks. They will then be routinely given to all men on discharge from hospital following surgery.

If you would like further information on these leaflets, contact the **AAA Screening Programme Manager, Diane Stewart** on **02890 638256** or [diane.stewart@belfasttrust.hscni.net](mailto:diane.stewart@belfasttrust.hscni.net)



## Symptoms of an AAA

Most people with an abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA) have no symptoms. However, if an aneurysm is rapidly increasing in size or rupturing there will be symptoms; and these will usually be large aneurysms.

Any patient over 50 years of age who has abdominal, back or flank pain (pain in the side), especially when associated with syncope (fainting) or shock, should have an AAA excluded.

**Progressive symptoms will be of particular concern. Any patient who has these symptoms and a known AAA should have a presumptive diagnosis of a ruptured AAA.**

A rapidly expanding or ruptured AAA can be difficult to diagnose. Ruptured AAAs can also be misdiagnosed as renal colic, pancreatitis, bowel ischemia, diverticulitis, cholecystitis, bowel obstruction and myocardial infarction.

The **classic presentation of a ruptured AAA** is the triad of:

- severe abdominal, back or flank pain (which can radiate to the chest, groin or leg);
- shock or hypotension (due to loss of blood); and
- a pulsating abdominal mass.

Only a minority with a rapidly expanding or ruptured AAA present with this classic triad.

The most consistent presenting feature is pain, followed by low blood pressure (hypotension). However, the blood pressure may be normal. A high index of suspicion is required on the part of the doctor making the diagnosis. Doctors should consider a diagnosis of expanding or ruptured AAA in patients with any of the symptoms or signs of AAA.

**Dr Adrian Mairs, Consultant in Public Health Medicine**

### Existing Information Sources for GPs

Information on the NI AAA Screening Programme is available in the following formats via the website or by contacting **Helen McCann** directly on **02890 311611** or e-mailing [helen.mccann@hscni.net](mailto:helen.mccann@hscni.net)

**GP Information Pack** | **GP Awareness Presentations** | **Promotional Materials** | **Copies or E copies of our newsletter 'The AAA Team'** | **Screening Invite leaflet 'AAA Screening : Things you need to know'** | **Leaflets for men under surveillance for small, medium or large AAAs**