

'Spotlight' Report

PSA testing

Prostate cancer

1. Background Information

As Healthwatch Worcestershire [HWW] we are the independent champion for people who use publicly funded health and social care services who live or work in Worcestershire. Healthwatch Worcestershire carries out several statutory functions which can be summarised as:

- Gathering peoples' experiences of health and social care services on which to make recommendations to the NHS or Worcestershire County Council as to how services could or should be improved,
- providing information & Advice to people about how or where health & social care services can be accessed, and
- monitoring the quality and safety of those services on behalf of local people.

We focus on health & social care issues that are of concern to the local population. One of those issues is patients' access to, and experiences of NHS England's **'Informed Choice Programme'** for PSA testing. Therefore, we have started to explore with patients their experiences of requesting a PSA test from their GP. In this 'Spotlight' report:

- We provide information about NHS England's 'Informed Choice Programme' for PSA testing,
- report on the patient experience of accessing PSA tests from their GPs, and
- make recommendations towards improving access to PSA testing within NHS England's 'Informed Choice Programme' in Worcestershire.

[NB We do not attempt to report detailed finding in this report but will do so at the conclusion of the project.]

2. NHS England's 'Informed Choice Programme' for PSA Testing

You are at a higher risk of developing prostate cancer if you:

- Are aged over 50
- Have a close relative, for example brother or father, who has had prostate cancer

- Are of black ethnic origin [double the risk]

There is no single test for prostate cancer. One of the tests is a blood test called a prostate-specific antigen [PSA] test measures the level of PSA and may help to detect early prostate cancer.

Whilst there is currently no national screening programme for prostate cancer there is an NHS informed choice programme, called prostate cancer risk management. For healthy men over 50 or over who ask their GP about PSA testing. It aims to give men good information on the pros and cons of a PSA test. If a man is 50 or over and decided to have his PSA level tested after talking to a GP, the GP can arrange for it to be carried out free on the NHS.

You can find out about prostate cancer and the PSA test here:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/prostate-cancer/psa-testing/>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prostate-specific-antigen-testing-description-in-brief/psa-testing-and-prostate-cancer-advice-for-men-without-symptoms-of-prostate-disease-aged-50-and-over>

3. Methodology and Early Results

Kidderminster & Worcestershire Prostate Cancer Support Group [KWPCSG] is voluntary sector organisation in Worcestershire which supports prostate cancer patients and their families and is a member of HWW's Reference & Engagement Group.

We have collaborated with KWPCSG to survey the experience of access to PSA testing from men who attended 2 events organised by KWPCSG. Those events took place at Pershore in September and in Kidderminster in October 2023. The survey gathered the experiences of 156 men who attended the 2 events as well as the location of their GP practice in the county. Most of the attendees identified as white male aged over 60.

Whilst the responses were mixed with some respondents reporting favourably on access to PSA testing 48 attendees reported that their GP had either discouraged them or refused to provide a PSA test. This included 16 respondents who had a family history of prostate cancer.

In summary the results indicated that there is an unwarranted variation in access to PSA testing under NHS England's 'Informed Choice Programme' and at this early stage in the project we conclude that the following recommendations could improve access to PSA testing to men over 50 without symptoms:

Recommendation 1

To write to the GP Practices in Worcestershire with a request for assurance that the Practice is complying with NHS England's 'Informed Choice Programme' for PSA testing.

Recommendation 2

To inform the CEO of NHS Herefordshire & Worcestershire of the survey results to date and HWW's concerns about the apparent unwarranted variation in access to NHS England's 'Informed Choice Programme' for PSA testing in Worcestershire.

4. Next Steps

HWW will continue to gather the experience of access to NHS England's 'Informed Choice Programme' for PSA testing with a focus on:

- men who are at higher risk of developing prostate cancer, and
- men who are over 50 and live with health inequalities.