

The AAA Team

Newsletter of the Northern Ireland AAA Screening Programme



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Service User Screening Experience



Maud and Matthew (Don) Cadden, along with the Programme's Clinical Lead, Mr Paul Blair, at the 2015 Service User Event at Knockbracken

Matthew Cadden (known to friends as Don) from Londonderry/Derry, and his wife, Maud, were among a number of couples who attended this year's Service User Event.

Don had no worries about his health when he received an invitation from the AAA Screening Programme to go along for a scan. As he explains: "In March 2014 I received the letter to attend for AAA screening at the local health centre. I was in no way concerned about going for a scan, believing that no issues would be identified, and thought 'Why not? – any health check has to be a positive step to looking after my health'."

On the day of his appointment, Don was shown into the scanning room where the procedure was explained to him. The test was simple and pain-free. Some gel was applied to his skin and an ultrasound scanner was moved

across his abdomen. The scan detected that Don had a medium-sized aortic aneurysm. As most AAAs grow very slowly, men - with a small or medium AAA - may never develop a large AAA that needs surgery, but will be monitored to see if it grows. Don continues: "The scan only took 15 minutes and afterwards I was told by the technician that I had a medium-sized aortic aneurysm. She gave me an information leaflet and said at this stage I only needed to be monitored. Since then I have been screened every three months to check for any changes. I have felt fully informed, reassured and supported throughout by the screening programme staff. In my opinion this 15 minute simple screening test has been well worthwhile and I would strongly advise all men aged 65 and over to participate."

2014 / 2015 Data

Screen detected AAAs on surveillance:		
14/15 cohort	=	101
Self-referrals	=	14
Large AAAs referred for surgery (including 2 self-referrals)	=	22
Self-referrals:	=	583

The screening year runs from 1/4/2014 to 31/3/2015. All men in Northern Ireland who turn 65 during this time will have been offered an initial screening appointment by the end of March 2015 (9,175 men).

Overall Data as at 30th June 2015 (since programme started in June 2012)

Uptake rate:	83%
Active Surveillance:	393
Large AAAs referred for surgery:	59
Total self-referrals:	1,566
Overall prevalence rate:	1.6%

Calling all GPs and Practice Staff! Don't forget SELF-REFERRAL...

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

2015 Service User Event - Knockbracken Healthcare Park

On Thursday 30 April, the programme hosted its third annual Service User Event on the outskirts of Belfast at Knockbracken Healthcare Park. The event was attended by 50 individuals, half of whom were service users, with the remaining participants representing members of the programme team and associated HSC professionals. As in previous years, the meeting aimed to:

- **Bring together men who had a screen-detected AAA over the last year (along with their wives/partners) to share their experience with other service users and the programme team.**
- **Receive feedback from event participants on how we might improve and develop the service.**

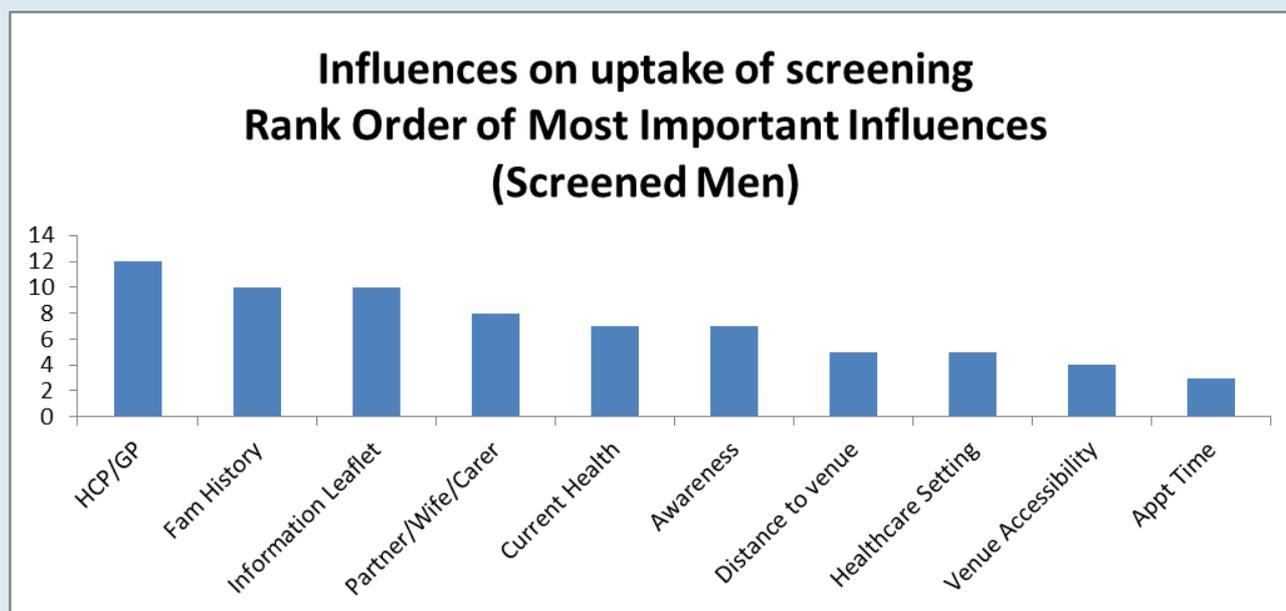
This year, in order to understand what influences or motivates men to attend or not attend for screening, service users were asked to tell us what influenced them. The responses were as follows:

- Encouragement from family
- Encouragement from GP / other healthcare professionals
- Being proactive about their health (eg already attending other appointments / receiving care)

We also asked them why they thought other men may not want to attend for screening. Some suggestions were:

- Fear of the unknown, including the diagnosis
- No symptoms
- May already have had scans which they think would pick this condition up

Participants were then asked to rate the importance of influencers / motivators to men attending screening from a pre-defined list, the outcomes of which are shown in the diagram below:



This knowledge will help the programme team to effectively target future promotion of the programme while also attempting to address some of the barriers to screening; with the overall aim being to increase uptake of screening across all sections of the community.

AAA Screening – reducing ‘Did Not Attend’ (DNA) rates

In just over three years, the NI Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm (AAA) Screening Programme has invited over **34,000** men for screening; over **28,000** of these men have been screened. Year-on-year the programme’s uptake has remained high at over **82%**.

However, there are still over **4,000** men who did not attend their appointment and made no contact with the programme. These men represent approximately **12%** of all those invited for screening (as illustrated). Given that our prevalence rate is currently around 1.6%, it is therefore possible that around **60 of the men who have not attended for screening may have an aneurysm**. The majority of these men will be unaware of this and will not be getting monitored.

We understand that some men consciously decide not to be screened for many valid reasons. However, we believe this represents only a small number of those who do not attend.

The programme already has a number of processes in place to reduce the number of men who do not attend.

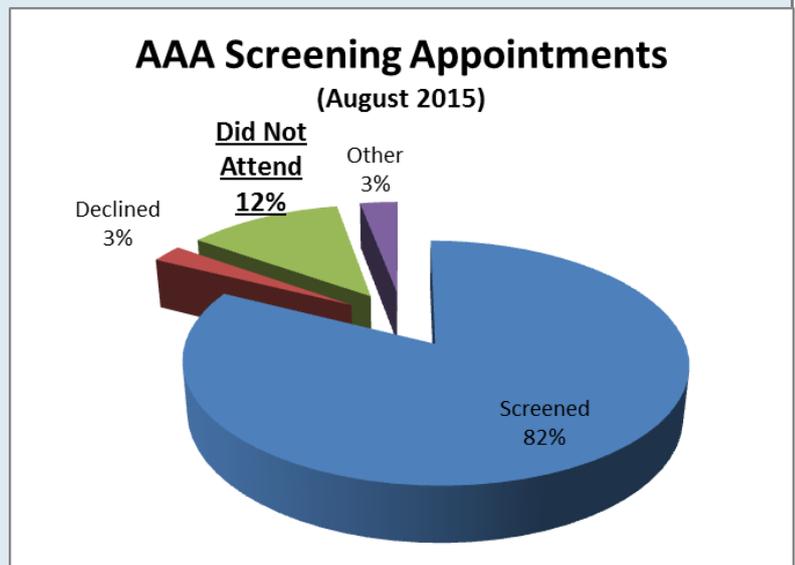
- When men do not attend their first appointment, the programme sends another one and copies this letter to GPs. If the man does not attend his second appointment, we write to both him and his GP; we confirm that we will not send any further appointments but advise if he changes his mind and would like to be screened he should contact the programme office.
- Once a year, we write to those who did not attend the previous year and let them know we have new clinics running. This has been effective over the last two years with each year approximately 100 men contacting the office to arrange appointments. We are planning on doing the same again this year.
- Each year the programme reviews existing clinic venues and identifies new screening locations close to the men who require screening. We currently have 21 venues across Northern Ireland.

We want to do more, so we are asking for your help:

We know from recent focus groups (attended by men who have taken part in the programme) that they considered **recommendation by their GP was a very important factor when making the decision to attend for screening**. We also know that around half of the men who self-refer to the programme (those over 65) are influenced to do so by their GP, either at appointment, through targeted mailing or by promotional material displayed within the surgery. We are therefore currently undertaking a project looking at non-attendance, concentrating initially in areas we have identified as having low uptake. We have written to a small number of GPs asking if they would be interested in working with us to look at ways we could support targeted work within their practice area.

We have also written to GPs who have already undertaken promotional work within their practices to understand how this work was undertaken, resource implications, benefits and any barriers they have encountered. We will use this information to look at ways we could support interested GPs to promote the programme among men in their practice.

A number of GP practices have also offered to promote the screening programme this year at their Flu Vaccination Clinics. We will provide these practices with information on AAA screening which can then be passed to each man at his appointment. **If you would be interested in any of the above initiatives to influence the uptake in your practice, or would like to know more, please contact either Roisin Monan or Diane Stewart on 02890 631828 or by email on aaascreening@belfasttrust.hscni.net**



For more information on the programme, visit our **WEBSITE** at:

www.aaascreening.info

Profile of the AAA Screening Technician

What we do:

Here at the NI AAA Screening Programme our main aim is to reduce the number of deaths from ruptured AAAs through early detection, surveillance and treatment.

As Screening Technicians, we travel across Northern Ireland on a daily basis, running clinics in 21 community based venues. We carry out ultrasound scanning of the abdominal aorta in accordance with national standard operating procedures.

We are responsible for explaining the procedure and implications of AAA screening to each man that comes for a scan with us and then informing them of the results at the end of the appointment.

When we find a large AAA we must ensure that the appropriate care pathway is followed by informing our Screening Programme Manager, who in turn then makes referrals to the vascular surgical team at the Royal Victoria Hospital as required.

To date we have detected over 450 AAAs since the programme began in June 2012. Many of the men who have been diagnosed with an AAA through our programme continue to return to our clinics on a yearly or 3 monthly basis for surveillance scans whilst others have progressed further and have undergone surgery to repair the AAA.

The best part of our job is knowing we make a difference when we have detected an AAA, especially when the man is referred on to the vascular team. It means that we have reduced the chance of rupture and ultimately saved a life. It is extremely rewarding to feel as though you helped to improve that man's health and make such a difference to his life.

Many men who attend screening consider themselves to be fit and healthy and very often don't expect to be told they have an AAA. We hope to create more public awareness of the programme to encourage others, who are eligible and have not yet attended for screening, to contact the office to make an appointment. It could save their life!



Clockwise from back row left: Ciara Conway, Deborah Galloway, Paula Heaney, Heather Hooisma, Elaine Donnelly, Pauline McMahon (Gillian Newell not included in photo)

The Northern Ireland AAA Screening Programme Technicians

Key contacts: Belfast H&SC Trust

Programme Mgr: Ms Diane Stewart, 02890 638256

Programme Office: 02890 631828

Key contacts: PHA

QA Manager: Mrs Jacqueline McDevitt, 02890 311611

Admin Asst: Ms Helen McCann, 02890 311611

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

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**