

## **How can the Irish Cancer Society adapt and deliver cancer prevention information to men over 40 years of age, from lower socioeconomic groups, taking into account potential health literacy and numeracy barriers?**

**Rationale:** Over 10,000 Irish men are diagnosed with cancer each year. (1) In 2013, the Irish Cancer Society commissioned a report looking at cancer incidence and mortality from a gender perspective in Ireland, this was undertaken by the Centre for Men's Health, Institute of Technology Carlow and the National Cancer Registry of Ireland (2). The report noted that a significant gender disparity exists in mortality and survival outcomes and that there is a need for more gender specific and effective targeting of men in terms of tackling the disproportionate impact of cancer mortality on the male population. A number of recommendations in this report point to the need for:

- More targeted and gender-specific health awareness initiatives and health information for men
- Specific programmes that promote early detection and prompt help seeking among men
- Further research on how and why men do or do not seek help at the most appropriate juncture

The Irish Cancer Society provides a number of services for people affected by cancer, the majority of the users of these services are women. An evaluation of the Irish Cancer Society's Cancer Information Service (CIS) in 2014 highlighted several 'hard-to-reach' groups that did not fit the profile of the typical user of the service. This included men, those who are less well educated, older people and non-Irish nationals. The report recommended that the Society make a concerted effort to engage with and target these individuals.

At the same time the OECD Adult Skills Survey shows that 17.9% or about 1 in 6, Irish adults are at or below level 1 on a five level literacy scale. While there was no statistical difference between men and women, adults aged 55 – 65 have the lowest mean score (3). This research also shows that 1 in 4 Irish adults score at or below level 1 for numeracy, which means 1 out of every 4 people in Ireland find it difficult to do simple maths calculations. Literacy and numeracy have a direct impact on employment, career opportunities and progression. But they also have huge implications for people's health and wellbeing.

In 2012, The European Health Literacy Survey reported that 10.3% of Irish respondents had inadequate health literacy and 29.7% had problematic health literacy. There was a significant difference between mean scores on health literacy between males and females. Females appear to have higher health literacy and better functional literacy. Regarding self-perceived social class, there was an obvious progression in health literacy score from lower class to higher (4).

Considering the joint findings of these reports; the Society and NALA are proposing to undertake research that will focus on how the Irish Cancer Society can adapt and deliver cancer prevention information to men over 40 years of age, from lower socioeconomic groups, taking into account potential health literacy and numeracy barriers. This study should

specifically focus on the cancer prevention information currently provided by the Society, not cancer support information for people already affected by cancer.

In NALA's updated policy document in 2009, their health literacy policy 'seeks to make the Irish health service literacy friendly where both the skills of individuals and the literacy demands of the health service are analysed. It wants to see a health service where literacy is not a barrier to treatment. It will work to influence the health service in every context: promotion, protection, prevention, access to care and maintenance' (6).

What is health literacy?

NALA use a two-pronged definition of health literacy, the healthcare provider communicating health information clearly *and* the patient understanding this information correctly. This is crucial for people's health and well-being. For the individual, health literacy is the ability to read, understand, and act on health information. The more effectively that people can act upon health information, the better their health outcomes will be. In addition, health numeracy is the ability to understand, use and act on numerical information. Most health information requires us to use basic numbers and calculations. People are, for example, expected to manage our medication by reading and or hearing instructions, understanding them, and working out doses (5).

### **Aims and objectives:**

The aim of this project is to assess how the Irish Cancer Society can adapt and deliver cancer prevention information to men over 40 years of age, from lower socioeconomic groups, taking into account potential health literacy and numeracy barriers.

- What facilitates these men to engage with the Irish Cancer Society?
- What are the barriers to these men engaging with the Irish Cancer Society?
- How and where do they want cancer prevention information?
- What are the recommendations of this study for the Irish Cancer Society services?

### **References:**

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