

Commissioner Brief

The importance of the “faith placed” bowel cancer screening awareness intervention designed by the British Islamic Medical Association (BIMA): Findings from a feasibility study conducted in selected mosques in Luton and Peterborough

The problem

Early detection and diagnosis of bowel cancer markedly improve survival outcomes – 9 in 10 people survive bowel cancer for five years or more when diagnosed at an earlier stage compared to 1 in 10 when diagnosed at a later stage.

Certain ethnic and religious groups, as well as people living in areas of high deprivation have been shown to be less likely to participate in the screening commissioned by NHS England. For example, South Asian and Muslim groups have lower uptake compared to White and Christian populations. This results in avoidable health disparities and poorer survival outcomes.

The intervention

The intervention is an hour-long, face-to-face group session on bowel cancer screening. It covers benefits, risks, and practical information; and features elements adapted to the target audience. It is based on a slightly modified presentation from Cancer Research UK, with alterations including a slide motivating attendees through Islamic health principles as well as local data on cancer diagnosis and survival rates in the mosque community. It also features graphics tailored to Muslim culture such as women wearing hijabs.

The intervention is delivered by clinicians who either practice in or hail from communities of interest. Their cultural competencies help establish a better rapport with participants and deliver the intervention in a culturally sensitive

and appropriate manner. It also helps reduce any language barriers and encourage attendees to better engage with the session.

The group sessions are gender-concordant (male clinicians for men and female clinicians for women) to accommodate Islamic gender norms.

The approach is described as “faith placed” rather than “faith based” because it uses faith settings (mosques) to target specific communities without mixing religious and health messages together.

Impact

Our findings show that, following the educational session, there was an immediate positive change in both understanding of and attitudes towards bowel cancer screening in the intervention group.

Our analysis of the local NHS Bowel Cancer Screening Hub data suggests that those who took part in the intervention session were more likely to participate in bowel cancer screening in the following 2 years than those who did not attend the session. This suggests a potential for the intervention to create a long-term change in behaviour.

Overall, the intervention was seen as more effective in delivering the health message compared with traditional cancer screening campaigns. Its content was culturally and religiously tailored to South Asian Muslim communities, making it more approachable. Mosques were seen as more accessible settings which were able to reach a wider audience. Having clinicians from these communities deliver

the intervention created a level of trust and credibility.

Key points for commissioners

- Our findings suggest that the BIMA intervention can be successful in creating a positive change in participants’ attitudes and behaviour. A larger-scale study evaluating the impact, accessibility and acceptability of the intervention is needed to build on the initial findings and to provide more robust evidence to inform potential policy and practice decisions. The BIMA intervention has the potential to improve bowel cancer diagnosis rates and survival outcomes and to reduce healthcare costs (e.g. through shorter treatment).
- Our feasibility study gathered key findings about the BIMA intervention and its effective implementation including the content of the educational session along with where and how it should be delivered. Further evidence-based recommendations and a full summary of the preliminary results highlighting the potential of the intervention in cancer prevention is available in the final report.
- There are opportunities for future adaptations of the intervention to suit the needs of other ethnic and/or religious communities. There is also a possibility of using a similar approach in public health campaigns focused on other health issues.

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More information on the project can be found at: <https://arc-ee.nihr.ac.uk/research-implementation/research-themes/prevention-and-early-detection/evaluation-british-islamic>

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