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Belfast
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To: all GP Practices

Tel 028 95363305

Date: 6 August 2021

Dear Colleague,

IMPORTANT: follow up information on Introduction of Quantitative Faecal Immunochemical Test (qFIT) and the new NICaN Lower GI Suspected Cancer Pathway. Please disseminate to all staff members including nurses, administrative staff, GPs, Locum GPs and Practice managers.

The HSCB wrote to practices at the end of June to inform them that Primary Care now has direct access to qFIT (quantitative Faecal Immunochemical Test). It is now recommended that qFIT is carried out in line with the new pathway where possible on all patients with new lower GI symptoms, as part of the initial investigation.

Since its launch on the 5th July 2021, we are pleased to advise that uptake has been rapid with the vast majority of practices having ordered test kits – approximately 10,000 kits were delivered in July. An audit of the first 1,533 samples indicates that c72% have a result of <7 µg Hb/g. Studies show that in the absence of anaemia, especially where symptoms are not persistent or progressive, this result can offer reassurance to both the patient and the GP and help avoid unnecessary referral usually for invasive tests for patients. Furthermore almost 4% of results were >400 µg Hb/g which studies suggest indicates an 80% chance of bowel cancer. For these patients, the availability of qFIT in primary care will inevitably help speed up their pathway.

We would like to draw your attention to a few issues that have been identified during the first month and ask for your cooperation in continuing to embed this important test and pathway.

Ordering FIT kits: Unfortunately a supply chain issue has led to a delay in processing of some orders towards the end of July/start of August. In order to manage the demand during this period some practices may not have received the full quantity ordered. Practices whose orders were only partially fulfilled will need to complete a new order if they need more. The supply issue has been resolved and we do not foresee any further issues in this regard.

qFIT Kits and Patient Information leaflets should be ordered using the following link [GP Stationery / Medical Consumables Ordering – FPS eBusiness \(healthandcareni.net\)](#). Please note that qFIT tests have an expiry date so we would encourage you to order as you need and not be tempted to stockpile. Practices can order daily and supplies are distributed quickly. Orders should usually reach you within 7 days depending on the delivery cycle associated with your address. If orders are not received before the cycle cut-off they are processed and sent in the next week's delivery. Practices can contact BSO if they are unsure of their schedule for ordering and delivery – the Customer Helpline Number is 028 95 361301

Patient Information leaflets: Leaflets are temporarily exhausted however a copy of the leaflet can be downloaded from the NICaN website (link below). We are in the process of procuring new leaflets and will make them available as soon as possible.

Laboratory processing: The laboratories are experiencing some issues in the way samples are being sent to them. BSO supplies had been issuing a green bag to hold the qFIT kit and some samples have been sent to the laboratory in these bags. These however are not Biochemistry forms. The biochemistry forms should be completed these are essential for details on the patient and the request. Other samples have been received without an addressograph or date on the qFIT sample. It is vitally important that staff (administrative or nursing) who forward qFIT samples to the laboratory ensure that the following is checked:

qFIT lab return checklist

1. Patient addressograph and date are on the qFIT sample kit.
2. Patient addressograph, test required and date are on the **biochemistry form** and
3. The sample kit is enclosed in a properly completed biochemistry form DO NOT place in the green bag or any other bag/envelope.

Please discard any green bags in your practice to avoid any future confusion. BSO supplies will no longer provide green bags with future orders.

If in the rare case results are not returned when expected, please contact Clinical Biochemistry laboratory at Causeway 028 70346180 and select option 3 for specimen reception and test information.

qFIT Result Reporting: The qFIT results will be reported with the statement 'unaccredited test'. This is because FIT is a new test for the laboratory and is not yet included in their accreditation. Please be assured, this does not mean that there is anything wrong with the sample or it's processing so please ignore this statement. Remember a report $<7 \mu\text{g Hb/g}$ is normal and any result $\geq 7 \mu\text{g Hb/g}$ is abnormal and requires a red flag referral. The laboratory is looking into adding a reference range as well as a mechanism of highlighting an abnormal result to the practice.

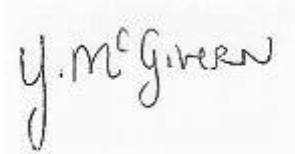
Referrals to Secondary Care: Secondary care colleagues have identified a number of lower GI referrals which do not mention that a qFIT has been completed or that (for certain symptoms as per pathway) it has been arranged and will follow. It is vital that you mention the qFIT result on the referral or advise that it has been arranged and is expected to be available on ECR for triaging. This will avoid any delay in your patient's pathway.

We would like to remind staff of the full set of information available via the NICaN website <https://nican.hscni.net/info-for-professionals/primary-care/qfit/>. This includes the symptoms and pathway, FAQs, information for treatment room staff, information on ordering and links to educational webinars

Finally, we would like to thank all of our primary care colleagues for engaging so successfully with us to bring this test to patients at a time when practices are under unprecedented pressure.

Many thanks for your cooperation.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Y. McGivern". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large 'Y' and 'M'.

Dr Yvonne McGivern
General Practitioner
Macmillan Primary Care Director NICaN

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barry McAree". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large 'B' and 'M'.

Mr Barry McAree MD FRCSI
Consultant Colorectal Surgeon
NICaN CRG Lead Lower GI

'Think qFIT, Do qFIT and Mention qFIT if referring'
<http://nican.hscni.net>