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To: All GP Practices

Tel 028 95363305

Date: 26 October 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.

We wrote to practices at the end of June to inform you 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.

We would like to thank you for all your engagement to date. Uptake has been rapid; all practices have ordered test kits and over 30,000 kits have been delivered. Labs have processed approximately 14,500 qFIT tests from primary care of which 71% were normal (<7), 20% were abnormal (>7) and 9% were unable to be processed.

As this is a new pathway and test we are closely monitoring all aspects and would like to draw your attention to a few issues that have been identified during the first 4 months and ask for your cooperation in continuing to embed this important test and pathway.

Patient Referrals

We are delighted that a great many GPs have enthusiastically adapted practice of “think qFIT, do qFIT, mention qFIT result if referring.” However some patients continue to be referred with no mention of the qFIT result or that, for exceptions listed in pathway, it has been arranged and will follow. This is making the patient’s diagnostic journey longer and more complicated.

During the introduction of qFIT and NICaN Lower GI Suspected Cancer Pathway in July 2021, it was agreed that in order to allow the process to bed in, secondary care would continue to have access to qFIT for a period of three months, up to 5th October, enabling them to issue tests to patients referred without a qFIT result. We have managed to extend this by a further 6 weeks. **However, from 15th November we will need to move to a position whereby all referrals will require a qFIT to be included in the referral. Unfortunately referrals will be returned if a qFIT is not attached (exceptions listed in pathway).**

Remember a qFIT of 7 and above requires consideration of a red flag referral. A qFIT result of <7 with other normal blood tests and examination findings negates the need for referral in many circumstances. As discussed in the initial FAQs, GPs can discuss management options with these patients but if symptoms continue then the qFIT can be repeated in two months. If the repeat is again normal yet the GP feels that there are symptoms or signs of major concern they can still make the decision to refer either on a red flag or urgent basis.

Reporting of results from labs

Highlighting of abnormal results: We have been working with the laboratory to ensure that abnormal qFIT results are easily identifiable to general practice. From 23rd September 2021 abnormal results are identified with a **red exclamation mark !** and the upper range of normal.

Unaccredited test notification: As previously advised, 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.

Minimum dataset and errors: It has been reported that 9% of samples are unfortunately unable to be processed due to minimum dataset and other errors with the sample kit. Please ensure that the biochemistry forms are completed in full, these include the essential details on the patient and the request. Other samples have been received without an addressograph on the form and FIT kit. All practices should have a label printer. If your practice has no access to label printers please contact nican.office@hscni.net

In order to ensure an accurate result can be processed it is essential that the date of sample is correct. Therefore qFIT samples and forms received in the laboratory without 'date of sample' handwritten on the FIT kit and form (as below) will not be reported. A comment 'No sample date on form or sample, Please repeat' will be issued with no result.



Transmission issue: There have been a few incidents reported by GPs whereby results have not been transmitted as expected. Results were on ECR but not on the GPs lab report. This has been investigated and a setting change was required. Labs have been contacting any practices where they have noticed a failure to transmit. In some instances, there may be a need for practices to contact their software provider.

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

Ordering

As previously advised qFIT Kits and Patient Information leaflets should be ordered using the following link [GP Stationery / Medical Consumables Ordering – FPS eBusiness \(healthandcareni.net\)](http://healthandcareni.net). Patient Information leaflets are now back in stock. Orders should usually reach you within 7 days depending on the delivery cycle associated with your address.

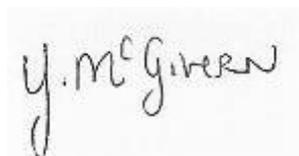
We would like to remind staff of the full set of information available via the NICaN website <https://nican.hscni.net/info-for-professionals/primary-care/qfit/>. This includes the symptoms and pathway, FAQs, information for treatment room staff, information on ordering and links to educational webinars.

A further educational session on FIT will be on Tuesday 9th November, 1pm – 2pm. A flyer is attached with details on how to register.

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,



Dr Yvonne McGivern
General Practitioner
Macmillan Primary Care Director NICaN



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

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