

Press Release

Global award for innovative testing programme

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An innovative Tayside scheme to enhance the early detection of bowel cancer has received a prestigious global healthcare award.

Dr. Craig Mowat, Clinical Senior Lecturer at the University of Dundee's School of Medicine, led the team who piloted a test to investigate patients visiting their GP with new bowel symptoms in 2015.

That team, from NHS Tayside's Blood Sciences and Gastroenterology department, alongside Primary Care colleagues, have now won the Global Distinction UNIVANTS of Healthcare award.

Until the testing pathway was put in place, patients who visited their GP with bowel symptoms would be sent for a colonoscopy – an internal diagnostic procedure involving a miniature camera – which for the majority will prove normal.

Patients now receive a Faecal Immunochemical Test (FIT) which accurately predicts which patients are extremely unlikely to have serious bowel disease. The test uses a faeces sample to test for the presence of blood which can be a sign of cancer or bowel disease. If blood is undetectable, this could rule out the need for a colonoscopy for many patients and speed up the investigation of those that do.

The test, which is available at all GP practices in Tayside, helps speed up the diagnosis of bowel cancer and serious bowel disease, as well as reducing unnecessary and often invasive further testing.

Since the new testing pathway was introduced in Tayside in 2015, the number of patients referred for a colonoscopy in Tayside has fallen by 15% - around 1,400 patients per year. The pioneering testing scheme has now been rolled out in all health Boards across Scotland.

Dr. Mowat said, "Introducing FIT testing into Primary Care was a huge team effort. Our research has demonstrated that the faecal haemoglobin result is a very important extra piece of information that GPs can use to determine whether their patient requires invasive investigations or not. We are delighted to have received this award."

Through the introduction of this service, Dr. Mowat's research group in Dundee has pioneered the study of faecal haemoglobin in symptomatic patients who attend their GP, which in turn has informed the NICE guidelines on Suspected Cancer.

They have demonstrated that faecal haemoglobin concentration is a fundamental determinant of whether a patient may harbour significant bowel disease and the work has formed the basis of the Scottish Government's guidance on recovery of endoscopy services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The UNIVANTS of Healthcare Excellence Programme is a prestigious award programme which was set up to inspire and celebrate healthcare excellence. It recognises teams who collaborate across disciplines and transform healthcare delivery, and ultimately patient lives.