

THE NHS are encouraging men and women between the ages of 50 and 74 to complete a bowel screening test to help detect possible signs of bowel cancer at an early stage.

Bowel cancer is the third most common cancer in Britain and 70% of those affected are over the age of 65. There are over 40,000 cases of bowel cancer in the UK each year however, with bowel screening; the diagnosis of those affected can be significantly improved.

Despite a higher uptake level than the national average in Inverness and the population around the Moray Firth – at 62.4% - the Nairn Healthcare Group are urging more people to take part. In the case of many people, the test can be instrumental in detecting cancer and saving lives.

If the cancer is detected at an early stage, it greatly increases the chances of a positive outcome. Through the Scottish Bowel Screening Programme individuals can take part in a free home-screening test in which the abnormal presence of blood in bowel motions can be detected and investigated – as this symptom can indicate a higher risk of bowel cancer.

Mr William Bower, 67, formerly of Nairn, discovered that he had a tumour in his bowel after submitting a test to the Bowel Screening Centre last year.

Mr Bower, who is now recovering after successful surgery to remove the tumour, said: “After the third occasion that I had taken the test, the Scottish Bowel Screening Centre offered me a colonoscopy as they have found abnormalities in the results.”

The test is done individually at home and returned to the bowel screening centre, where the results are analysed. Participants whose tests show abnormalities are then offered further tests (e.g. a colonoscopy) by the NHS to try to detect early signs of bowel cancer.

The procedure was simple and Mr Bower was told of the outcome of it straight away. The test had detected a small tumour in his colon that a biopsy revealed to be malignant and he was able to have surgery to remove it shortly afterwards.

“I am extremely thankful that I took the time to complete the test each time it was sent to me,” said Mr Bower. “Thanks to the bowel screening programme, the tumour was discovered at an early stage and had not spread any further.”

If bowel cancer is detected and removed before it spreads to the lymph nodes, further treatments such as chemotherapy are not required. The NHS offers free tests and screenings to all people aged over 50 and the Nairn Healthcare Group aims to increase uptake of individuals in the area taking the test.

The Scottish Bowel Screening Centre recommends that the test is carried out once every two years for people between 50 and 74 years of age.

Mr Bower continued: “I tell everyone I know what an important thing bowel screening is. For such a simple and quick process it can have life-changing consequences. I am deeply grateful to the Scottish Bowel Screening Programme and to the NHS – both for providing the test and for the wonderful care and support I received at Raigmore Hospital during my treatment.”

A free test set should arrive by post on your 50th birthday and once every two years thereafter. The assessment is non-intrusive and simple and the results can have a vital impact on your health. As a result, the Nairn Healthcare Group asks those in the target age bracket to please consider participating in the Bowel Screening Programme.

For further information, or if you have any questions, please contact the Scottish Bowel Screening Centre free phone helpline on 0800 0121 833, Monday-Friday 8am-5pm.