

CHAMPIONS URGE US TO GET FREE HEALTH CHECK

....Shropshire County Primary Care Trust appoints five local Health Check Champions



Caption: (left to right) Health Check Champions, Collette Davies, Zoe Day, Mark Davies, Cathy Warner and Andy Skinner.

Five plucky Shropshire volunteers are celebrating being selected as Health Check Champions and, to mark the occasion, have disrobed to launch a poster and billboard campaign to promote a free NHS Health Check for local people.

The campaign aims to prevent heart disease, stroke, diabetes and kidney disease, by encouraging people aged between 40-74 years to book their free Health Check when they get an invite from their GP through the post. Nationally everyone between 40 and 74 who has not already been diagnosed with heart disease, stroke, diabetes or kidney disease, will receive an invite for their Free Health Check at some point in the next five years. It is hoped this campaign will be memorable and that people won't forget to go when they get their invite.

People in Shropshire will be seeing a lot more of; Collette Davies from Shrewsbury, Zoe Day from Ellesmere, Mark Davies from Shrewsbury, Cathy Warner from Bridgnorth and Andy Skinner from Highley. The five unpaid volunteers, selected from over 50 applicants from all over Shropshire, were nominated by friends or relatives on the social networking site Facebook.

Their faces (and bodies) will become familiar sights on local posters and buses over the coming weeks and months, to drive home the message that detecting the early signs of serious medical conditions (and adopting a healthy lifestyle) can make a huge difference to people's health.

The champions are unpaid, but they all have interesting stories to tell about how health issues have affected their families and themselves. To give people more information about the Health Checks and to introduce the champions, people can view a short video at www.youtube.com/user/HeroesActFAST/videos?sort=dd&view=u.

Dr Kevin Lewis, Shropshire County PCT's Director of Preventative Health Programmes, explains: "These enthusiastic Health Check Champions will be seen all over Shropshire and we are sure their faces and stories will help promote the importance of a check up much more effectively than any other method we could use. We think people will warm to them, take notice of what they say and book appointments at their GP surgeries (when they receive an invitation) to improve their chance of a longer, healthier life.

"Over the next five years people will receive an invite for their Free Health Check. We are encouraging people to book their appointment. By having a Health Check you and your health professional can look at your health and lifestyle, identify any problems and look at ways to minimise future problems. Don't wait till you know something is wrong, have a Health Check and try and avoid future health risks.

"By posing this way, the champions are demonstrating confidence that there is nothing to fear - don't worry, however, the Health Checks are actually carried out fully clothed. We are so grateful for our volunteers' help with the campaign."

-ENDS-

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Champions: Mark Davies from Shrewsbury aged 53. Collette Davies from Shrewsbury (not related) aged 44. Cathy Warner from Bridgnorth aged 66. Zoe Day from Ellesmere aged 50. Andy Skinner from Highley aged 50. For more details contact Jenny Fullard.

Quotes from the Champions: Mark Davies: "My father died of a massive heart attack when he was 49 years old, I was just 11. My mother died of cancer and my brother has

Type 2 diabetes. I thought to myself, you've got to be aware, you've got to get checked at an early stage'. Your health is your wealth, that's my opinion. I think this campaign is fantastic."

Collette Davies: "I saw the campaign advertised on Facebook. I clicked and thought, 'what's this all about?' When I saw it, I thought that would be rather nice to get involved in, a really worthwhile campaign, it's a unique way of aiming at the public. I thought, 'Hey, if people see me and say don't I know you from somewhere?' I could say, 'yes, and have you had your free Health Check yet'."

Zoe Day: "I think this is a good cause. I was 50 this year, so it all ties in with things that I have planned for myself. I have had a couple of issues with health in the last few years and that has made me more aware about looking after myself."

Cathy Warner: "My husband had mouth cancer last year and it was only discovered because a saliva gland swelled up. He went to the doctors and when they investigated a tumour was found. So we went to the hospital and experienced 12 months of all the things that relate to cancer. He had an operation and it made me realise that you just don't know when you are ill. But a Health Check could have found it earlier."

Andy Skinner: "I lost a lot of weight in the summer. Like most blokes, I just ignored it. I didn't go to my doctor. Eventually I got more and more anxious about what it might be. Some friends came round and asked what was up? It was then I realised I needed to see my doctor. Through that visit I had some blood tests and scans. Everything is okay - just a few bits and pieces - but during that process one of the nurses said to me, 'just put your experience on a blog for other guys like you to see, instead of going through all the agony and worry. Stop building everything up in your mind. If there is something it needs sorting out early. So that's what I did, not realising that taking part in this campaign would be the outcome.'"

The Health Check checks for risk factors responsible for heart disease and other vascular diseases such as stroke, diabetes and kidney disease. The Health Check is carried out fully clothed.

Who is included? Health Check will not include people who have had a previous diagnosis of these conditions.

How long will it take? The Health Check takes about 20-30 minutes and consists of questions about family medical history, health and lifestyle and there will be a few simple physical checks. If any risks are identified, there will be an opportunity to discuss lifestyle, diet changes or treatment - and also to learn about any available help and support.

Why Health Check? Health Check is about prevention and reducing risk. Local champions will embody the message and show that Health Check is nothing to fear.