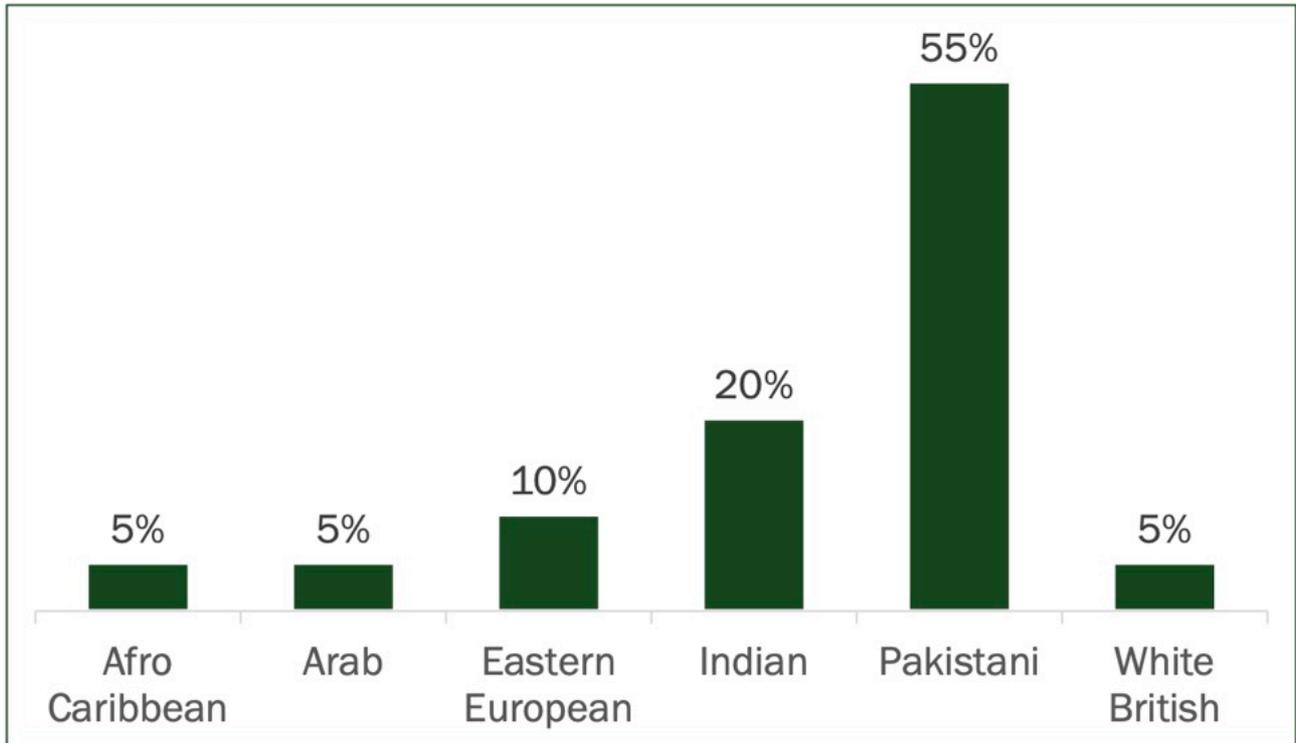




# **TEA & CHAT – HOW TO SPOT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF CANCER**

**JULY 2024**

## Ethnicity of Participants



## Overview

This “Tea & Chat” session focused on raising awareness about the signs and symptoms of cancer, with a particular emphasis on early detection and addressing cultural barriers within the Muslim community.

Facilitated by Safia Nazir and Sophie Marshall. **Sophie Marshall**, a Cancer Awareness Nurse at Cancer Research UK, uses her personal experience as a cancer survivor to raise awareness and promote early detection. **Safia Nazir**, founder of Safeena Muslim Cancer Support Network, launched the UK’s first national Muslim cancer charity in memory of her mother. She works to break stigma and provide culturally sensitive cancer support in Muslim communities.

The session aimed to empower attendees with knowledge and encourage proactive health-seeking behaviour. The session objectives were to:

- To raise awareness of early signs and symptoms of cancer.

- To underline the importance of early detection and screening.
- To explore the cultural and social barriers that can delay seeking medical advice.
- To encourage the use of support systems and fair access to healthcare.



## Key Topics

**Understanding Cancer Symptoms** – attendees were introduced to the range of symptoms associated with over 200 types of cancer. These were grouped as:

- *Specific symptoms:*
  - Lumps or swelling (e.g. in the neck, breast)
  - Skin changes or persistent, localised pain
- *General symptoms:*
  - Ongoing tiredness
  - Unexplained weight loss
  - Night sweats or fever
  - Unexpected bleeding (e.g. in urine, stool, vomit)

**The Value of Early Detection** - attendees were encouraged to understand the importance of recognising early warning signs of cancer.

It was made clear that early diagnosis significantly improves the chances

of successful treatment. Even mild or inconsistent symptoms, if persistent, should be checked by a healthcare professional.

**Screening Programmes** - national screening programmes available for breast, cervical, and bowel cancers were outlined.

Participants gained a clearer understanding of how routine screening can detect cancer at an early, more treatable stage, even before symptoms appear. Many reported not previously being aware of all three types of screening.

**Tackling Health Inequalities** – here we explored how structural and cultural factors contribute to delayed cancer diagnosis in certain communities.

Attendees recognised that stigma, fear, and lack of information can prevent timely medical care. The need for equitable access to female healthcare providers and culturally sensitive services was strongly emphasised.

**Challenges within the Muslim Community** – the specific barriers faced by Muslim women were explored, including cultural taboos and service accessibility. Women identified with the challenges described, such as the reluctance to speak openly about health, misinformation about cancer, and language barriers.



Many said the session helped them feel less alone and more confident about seeking support.

**Suggested Solutions** – the women discussed a range of practical, community-led approaches were shared to help overcome barriers to early detection and care. Participants saw the value of involving trusted community figures and improving access to female clinicians and interpreters. There was strong support for more open conversations within families and community settings.

**Practical Advice for the Community** - the session concluded with clear, actionable guidance for attendees to apply in their own lives.

Women were encouraged to remain aware of bodily changes, attend screening appointments, use local support networks, and speak up for fair and inclusive healthcare. Many said they left feeling more empowered to take control of their health.

### Participant Feedback

Feedback was gathered from attendees at the end of the session. Responses were largely positive, with participants expressing appreciation for the clarity of the information and the supportive environment. Many



reported feeling more confident in recognising potential warning signs of cancer and more inclined to seek medical advice promptly. The session was described as informative, respectful of cultural sensitivities, and practically useful.

### Notable Comments and Testimonials

Several participants shared personal reflections. One attendee said, "I had no idea that such small symptoms could mean something serious. I'll definitely be more aware now." Another remarked, "It's comforting to hear this explained in a way that respects our culture. I'll talk to my family about getting screened."

Other comments made were:

- *"I always thought cancer was something you only looked for if you felt very ill. I didn't realise small things like tiredness or bleeding could be signs."*
- *"It was helpful to hear this in a way that respected our beliefs and didn't make us feel judged."*
- *"In our culture, we don't speak openly about things like this, especially with older relatives. But now I feel I have the knowledge to start that conversation."*
- *"I appreciated that women's privacy and dignity were acknowledged. It makes it easier to consider screenings when we know we'll be treated with respect."*
- *"I didn't know there was a screening for bowel cancer. I thought it was just for breast and cervical cancer."*
- *"It's good to know that support is available, not just*



*from the NHS but also from community groups that understand our background."*

- *"My mother never went to the doctor unless something was very wrong. I now understand the importance of going earlier and encouraging her to do the same."*
- *"The session opened my eyes to how we sometimes delay care because we think it's shameful or unnecessary. But our health should come first."*

These comments highlight both the impact of the session and the importance of tailoring health education to cultural contexts.

## Conclusion

**Core Message:** Early detection saves lives. The session highlighted the importance of awareness, timely medical advice, and community involvement in reducing the impact of cancer. By recognising symptoms early and supporting one another, we can help improve health outcomes across all communities.

Report created by the Tea & Chat participants  
supported by the MWC Team

