



Northern Ireland Cancer Network  
Health & Social Care Board  
12-22 Linenhall Street  
Belfast  
BT2 8BS

To: To all GP Practices

Tel 028 95363305

Date: 25 June 2021

Dear Colleague,

### **Introduction of Quantitative Faecal Immunochemical Test (qFIT) and the new NICaN Lower GI Suspected Cancer Pathway**

Lower GI clinic and diagnostic scope waiting times are excessive across the region. In order to help address this and aid early detection we need to get the best available tests closer to patients.

We are delighted to inform you that access to qFIT (quantitative faecal immunochemical test) will soon be available for use via Primary care. Test kits are available to order from 28<sup>th</sup> June 2021 and we are recommending that qFIT is carried out where possible on all patients with new lower GI symptoms as part of initial investigation in general practice from 5<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

qFIT is a game-changer in our field which now enables us as a combined primary and secondary care team to transform care for this group of patients.

In conjunction with the availability of this exciting new test in primary care, the NI Cancer Network (NICaN) has amended the Lower GI Suspected Cancer criteria/pathway. The most up-to-date information has been collated here to support you with the implementation of qFIT and the amended red flag criteria/pathway – see attachments. We encourage you to read and circulate the supporting documentation within your practice and we have set out some key points as follows:

- qFIT is a much more sensitive test than FOBs and used in conjunction with primary care assessment and other tests (recommended work up in pathway/FAQs) it will greatly help you with your decision making. *Note – FOB's will cease being processed for any purpose from the date of this letter.*
- qFIT has a high negative predictive value for significant bowel disease (i.e. bowel cancer, inflammatory bowel disease and polyps  $\geq 1$ cm) and at the limit of detection used in Northern Ireland (7 $\mu$ g/g) is 99.6%. Therefore a negative result combined

with the absence of anaemia, especially when symptoms are not persistent or progressive, can offer reassurance to both the patient and the GP and help avoid unnecessary referral.

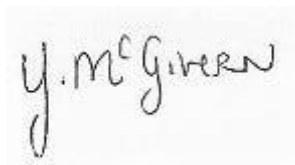
- Patients should be made aware that use of qFIT and the pathway will speed up their diagnostic process were necessary and they therefore should be made aware of the significance of completing the test. Red Flag referrals are often triaged within 24 hours of receipt. It is important that the qFIT result is included as part of the referral, as the result helps secondary care decisions around prioritisation of investigation (exceptions are listed in pathway and FAQs)
- It is estimated that currently over 20% of cancers are diagnosed via urgent/routine referral; the use of qFIT within the new pathway will help appropriately grade referrals for many patients with heightened risk of malignancy, especially younger patients who might otherwise have their diagnosis delayed when they have most to gain from early diagnosis.
- In order to embed the new pathway and encourage uptake of qFIT in primary care, it has been agreed that for an initial period of three months, secondary care will continue to have access to qFIT. Following the initial three month period (i.e. from 5<sup>th</sup> October 2021 onwards), secondary care will have limited access to qFIT and it is expected that all new patients will be referred with a qFIT.

To compliment the new pathway a Lower GI Suspect Cancer CCG template is under development which will ensure referral is routed to a single point of entry in each Trust – it is hoped that this will be available later this year.

Thank you for giving this your attention and remember for new lower GI symptoms:

**‘Think qFIT, Do qFIT and Mention qFIT if referring’**

Yours sincerely



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Macmillan Primary Care Director NICaN



Mr Barry McAree MD FRCSI  
Consultant Colorectal Surgeon  
NICaN CRG Lead for Colorectal Cancer

#### Attachments

The following supporting documents are attached and also available on the NICaN website [qFIT for lower GI symptoms | Northern Ireland Cancer Network \(hscni.net\)](https://www.hscni.net/qfit-for-lower-gi-symptoms)

- Frequently Asked Questions on implementation of qFIT and amended NICaN Lower GI Suspect Cancer Pathway
- NICaN Lower GI Suspected Cancer Pathway
- FIT Patient information leaflet
- Information for Treatment room staff on handing over FIT to patient
- Information for staff on ordering FIT kits and leaflets
- Link to recorded educational webinar (GPNI)  
<https://www.gpni.co.uk/webinars/gpni-nican-qfit-for-primary-care-a-pathway-fit-for-purpose/> If password required please email [nican.office@hscni.net](mailto:nican.office@hscni.net) or register to join GPNI mailing list
- Link to upcoming Practice Nurse and Managers GPNI educational webinar (29<sup>th</sup> June 2021, 12.30pm) To register:  
<https://zoom.us/meeting/register/tJllceisrT8rHNEYhKNLMzKFbyGy9k8rv34>