COUNTERING FRAUD IN NHS BOARDS

Over the last 18 months, NHS Scotland Counter Fraud Services has implemented a successful mainstream media campaign to raise staff and public awareness about the threats from fraud.

The most recent initiative to attract media attention is a fraud prevention project aiming to reduce fraud and error in dental patient Tax Credit exemption claims - potentially saving the health service more than £3 million per year.

The project was featured in a recent BBC ‘Saints and Scroungers’ TV programme and also attracted national, local and specialist press interest.

The campaign, which intentionally focuses on prevention rather than detection, highlights the need for patients to have a valid Tax Credit exemption certificate at the time of their treatment.

Fraser Paterson, National Fraud Prevention Manager, for Counter Fraud Services said: “If you hold a valid certificate then you’re entitled to receive free treatment, if you don’t you’re not – it’s as simple as that. When you think that every fourth person who claimed under this category last year wasn’t entitled to do so, you can understand why reducing this type of misclaiming is so important”.

The ‘Saints and Scroungers’ broadcast, viewed nationally by 1.1million people, is just one example of numerous, high profile media features highlighting CFS in the last 18 months. The work of the fraud investigation team has also featured in BBC Panorama and BBC Scotland Investigates programmes, and a recent Channel 5 programme highlighted the issue of NHS ‘sick pay’ fraud - where employees fraudulently claim to be unfit to work.

Recent BBC TV, STV and BBC Radio Scotland news programmes have also featured Counter Fraud Services investigations and subsequent successful prosecution of individuals, who have been found guilty of committing fraud against the NHS. This broadcast coverage has been augmented by the extensive interest of national newspaper titles, who have covered individual cases.

Fraser said that the successful efforts to get CFS work featured in the media are part of the drive to create an anti-fraud culture in NHS Scotland. “If we are going to reduce fraud to a minimum, it’s vital that we change attitudes and behaviours to this type of crime. People who defraud the NHS hurt all of us, because it’s our money that funds it and it's us who rely on it being there when we need it.”