BURNING QUESTIONS

How Common is Barrett's Oesophagus in UK? (A discussion)

Without a mass screening, we don't know how many have Barrett's. Some guesses are around the 300,000 – 500,000 figure but some estimations show it could be six or seven times that figure.

Around 1990, co-morbidity cadaver studies in the US found between 1 in 60 and 1 in 80 had Barrett's when they died of whatever cause.
If those figures are applied to UK population, it would mean about 1 million people in UK have Barrett's.

However, in US, with five times the population of UK, they only have twice the number contracting oesophageal cancer each year. Does that mean in UK Barrett's is 2.5 times more likely to develop to cancer or that we actually have 2.5 times the number with Barrett's, I.e. 2.5 million?

The Mayo Clinic in US, looking at results of various studies, propose the incidence of Barrett's is probably about 5% of the population indicating there could be 3 million with Barrett's in UK.

In a discussion in 2018, a gastroenterologist suggested everyone may have a few Barrett's cells dotted within their oesophagus ready to propagate if required to protect against acid attack.

Why is this important?

Around 9,000 people develop oesophageal cancer each year. (about 1 in 7000 of the general population.

If there are only around 300,000 with Barrett's, the risks of it mutating are around 0.3% (3 in 1000 or 21 times the risk of the general population).

If there are around 3 million with Barrett's, the risks of it mutating are around 0.03% (3 in 10,000 or only just over double the risk of the general population).