

## **New Cervical Cancer campaign**

There will be a new drive to ensure GPs spot cervical cancer symptoms earlier in young women and refer patients correctly, Health Minister Ann Keen announced today.

The review, carried out by the independent Advisory Committee on Cervical Screening (ACCS) reported concern that young women who present to their GPs with cervical cancer symptoms are not always being given appropriate advice and have recommended immediate action in this area including:

- New guidance on the management of young women with gynaecological symptoms and an audit of young women diagnosed with cervical cancer.
- An awareness campaign for GPs and practice nurses.
- An audit of all young women diagnosed with cervical cancer looking at their symptoms before diagnosis.
- An expansion of work to increase screening uptake in women aged 25 to 34.

The ACCS also agreed unanimously for no change in the screening age as evidence showed that earlier screening could do more harm than good causing too many false positives and could increase the risk of premature births in some women.

Health Minister Ann Keen said:

“In the past few months I have met with a number of young women who have cervical cancer. I have listened carefully and I am determined to make sure that our policy is in their best interests.

“That is why I asked the ACCS to carry out a review into the cervical screening age because I wanted to make sure that our guidelines are based on the latest available clinical evidence.

“They have concluded that the screening age should not be lowered but have recommended that we do more work around the treatment of symptomatic patients. I fully support this conclusion and look forward to beginning this important new work to ensure women with cervical cancer are diagnosed at the earliest possible opportunity.

“There has been a big public debate about this issue and a great deal of publicity about the causes and symptoms of cervical cancer. Together we can build on this work to help even more women across the country to take steps to prevent the disease and to identify symptoms early and save lives.”

ACCS Chairman Professor Henry Kitchener said:

“The Committee were unanimous in their decision not to lower the screening age below 25.

“This decision was taken because scientific evidence shows that screening women in this age group can do more harm than good.

“However we are concerned that young women with gynaecological symptoms are not always being given the right advice from their GPs and we will ask the Department of Health to take action.”

National Director for Cancer Professor Mike Richards said:

“The ACCS has done a very thorough job and I thank them for their work and fully agree with their recommendations.

“Importantly The ACCS has identified the need for urgent action on young women who present to their GPs with gynaecological symptoms. We know that early diagnosis is key to improving survival chances.

“We will develop guidance to support GPs and practice nurses so that young women with cervical cancer are diagnosed at the earliest opportunity.”

The ACCS will now consider ways to improve the way symptomatic patients are treated, with a particular focus on women under 25 and then make further recommendations to the Department of Health.

Ends

## WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

### DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

#### Cervical screening for women aged under 25 years

Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> June 2009

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health (Ann Keen):** I announced in my Written Ministerial Statement of 13<sup>th</sup> March 2009 that we had asked the independent Advisory Committee on Cervical Screening (ACCS) to formally review the evidence relating to risks and benefits of cervical screening in women under 25 years, including current evidence regarding incidence and mortality in young women.

The review took place at an extraordinary meeting of the ACCS held on 19<sup>th</sup> May 2009. The ACCS is an independent ministerially appointed committee, with most members nominated by their respective professional bodies. A number of guests were also invited to the review meeting to ensure all opinions and available evidence were heard, including the voluntary sector and patients.

No new scientific evidence was presented to the review meeting to support the reintroduction of screening in women under 25. Indeed some new evidence was presented indicating that screening is of little or no benefit in women in this age group. There is evidence that treatment following screening in this age group can lead to an increased risk of subsequent premature births, increasing the risk of babies dying or having severe disabilities. Evidence was also presented that showed there has been no significant increase in the number of women aged under 25 contracting or dying from cervical cancer since the policy change in 2004.

Members of the committee were unanimous that there was no reason to lower the age at which screening commences, which is in line with international recommendations

Members of the committee were, however, concerned that young women who present to their GPs with gynaecological symptoms are not always being given appropriate advice. They strongly recommended that the Department of Health should take further action in this area, and the ACCS will be considering how best to take this forward as a matter of urgency at their meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> June 2009. Members also recommended that more effort is made in increasing the uptake of cervical screening in women aged 25 to 34, where coverage has been falling in recent years. We will develop plans with NHS Cancer Screening Programmes and the National Awareness and Early Diagnosis Initiative to take this forward .

The committee will keep the decision closely under review, especially by monitoring the incidence of cervical cancer in young women. In the interests of transparency, the minutes of the review meeting have been placed in the House of Commons Library and will be made available on the Department of Health website.