

RCOG, BSCCP, FSRH and Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust Joint Response: Review of Adult Screening Programmes

16 October 2019

The RCOG, FSRH, Jo's Trust and BSCCP welcome the release of Professor Mike Richard's review of adult screening programmes in England. We are encouraged to see that our main concerns about the current cervical screening programme have been recognised.

In our joint submission to the review, we highlighted the worrying decline in cervical screening uptake and called for greater availability and flexibility of screening times and locations. We therefore support the recommendation that financial incentives should be offered to providers to promote out-of-hours and weekend appointments.

We are pleased to see that the review acknowledges that sexual and reproductive health services have a role to play in increasing uptake. Many women choose to access cervical screening at sexual and reproductive healthcare services, and women tested through this route have an above average HPV positivity rate. However, the number of screenings in sexual and reproductive healthcare services has halved since 2014/15. Cervical screening is not a mandated requirement for local authority commissioning of sexual and reproductive healthcare services and is not included in many service specifications. Therefore, we strongly support the review's call for consideration to be given as to how best to incentivise "alternative" providers such as sexual and reproductive health services. We urge commissioners and providers to include consideration of walk-in appointments at sexual and reproductive healthcare services and community clinics as part of this, to make cervical screening as accessible as possible.

The current fragmented approach to the commissioning and delivery of cervical screening has created confusion for women and risks for patient safety. It is encouraging that this has been recognised by Professor Richards. We fully support the call for an integrated approach to commissioning between primary care and sexual and reproductive health. We also welcome the recommendation for a simpler governance and advisory structure, with sole responsibility for the delivery of screening programmes residing with one organisation, and the appointment of a named director for screening which will provide clearer lines of accountability. It will be vital that the director for screening works closely with the national clinical director for maternity and women's health to ensure a joined-up approach to women's health.

We are pleased to see that our concerns about outdated and inadequate IT systems have been highlighted and that the IT system for cervical screening is identified as one of those most in need of renewal. It is encouraging that NHSX is already working on developing a new IT system for the cervical screening programme – this work must be given the highest priority.

Our submission identified concerns about the decline in the NHS cytologist workforce and subsequent problems providing sufficient cytology service capacity, in light of the move to primary HPV testing. Given the current backlog of cytology samples awaiting analysis, we support the recommendation to revisit, in the short term at least, the requirement that all samples should be assessed on one of the eight sites designated for cervical screening. We also support the recommendation for commissioners to work with organisations at a local level to identify and manage demand. The director for screening should work with HEE to ensure a system-wide response to workforce demand issues within screening services.

We urge the future director of screening to prioritise securing extra funding for screening programmes. It is clear that the screening service needs greater investment to ensure it can manage any welcome increase in demand, provide results within agreed timescales and utilise the best possible technology to provide the best service for patients.

As Prof Richards himself notes, many of the report's recommendations are high level, so we look forward to working with system leaders to add greater detail to these plans.

Notes

Royal College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists (RCOG)

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists is a medical charity that champions the provision of high quality women's healthcare in the UK and beyond. It is dedicated to encouraging the study and advancing the science and practice of obstetrics and gynaecology. It does this through postgraduate medical education and training and the publication of clinical guidelines and reports on aspects of the specialty and service provision. www.rcog.org.uk

British Society of Colposcopy and Cervical Pathology (BSCCP)

The BSCCP was founded in 1972 and represents a common forum for the discussion and debate of all matters pertaining to the prevention of cancer of the cervix. The balance between basic science, epidemiology, clinical care and service/patient interface is a characteristic of the Society and is typified by the high standard and variety of papers presented at the Annual Scientific Meeting.

Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust

Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust is the only UK charity dedicated to women, their families and friends affected by cervical cancer and cervical abnormalities. Their mission is to see cervical cancer prevented and reduce the impact for everyone affected by cervical abnormalities and cervical cancer through providing the highest quality information and support, and campaigning for excellence in cervical cancer treatment and prevention.

Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare (FSRH)

The Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare (FSRH) is the largest UK professional membership organisation working at the heart of sexual and reproductive health (SRH), supporting healthcare professionals to deliver high quality care. It works with its 15,000 members, to shape sexual reproductive health for all. It produces evidence-based clinical guidance, standards, training, qualifications and research into SRH. It also delivers conferences and publishes The Journal of Family Planning and Reproductive Health Care. For more information please visit: www.fsrh.org