



Dear colleague

### **NHS Breast Screening Programme: National Patient Notification Exercise**

Public Health England (PHE) and NHS England (NHSE) have become aware of an issue with the NHS Breast Screening Programme, which has led to some women not being invited for their final screen between their 68<sup>th</sup> and 71<sup>st</sup> birthday. This is now resolved, and NHSE, PHE and the Department of Health and Social Care have taken the decision together to offer a re-screen to women who have been affected. As part of this Patient Notification Exercise all of the affected women registered with a GP will receive a letter with clear advice and signposting.

This letter explains the issue, how it is being managed, and the arrangements for the Patient Notification Exercise.

#### **What has happened?**

Following an investigation started in January 2018, PHE identified that in some instances women less than 71 years who were eligible for a screen were not being invited. A number of complex issues led to this, including with an IT algorithm for the Age Extension trial which incorrectly randomised women into the control arm of the trial before they reached their 71<sup>st</sup> birthday, and variations in the way local services used the IT system to specify which women were invited for screening

#### **What has PHE done to mitigate these risks?**

PHE has carried out a thorough investigation of the whole system and a detailed analysis of the data since 2009. This is when the roll out of the current offer for a screen to women 50-70 years of age was completed across England in all breast screening services for all women.

A number of IT improvements and changes to processes have now been made to the screening invitation system and the issue has now been fixed.

PHE, NHS England and NHS Breast Screening Services have also worked closely together to implement and assure manual failsafe systems to complement the IT fixes, and additional guidance has been issued to screening services.

## How is PHE managing the Patient Notification Exercise?

- PHE with the support of NHS Digital is writing to all women who have been affected by this incident. All women registered with a GP will receive a letter by the end of May outlining how they can access the helpline and take up the screening offer if they wish. More than 206,000 women will receive a letter telling them about the issues.
- The letter will tell women who had not reached their 72<sup>nd</sup> birthday by 1/4/2018 that they will be sent a catch-up invitation for a screen by their Breast Screening Service. Women who were between 72 and 79 years on 1/4/2018 will be given information and offered the chance to make a self-referral via the dedicated helpline.
- All women affected who would like to take up the invitation for a screen will be offered an appointment by the end of October 2018.
- PHE is putting in place a helpline for women who want further information and for women who have cancer.
- **The Helpline telephone number is 0800 169 2692**
- NHS Choices will have specific information for women affected by this incident. Information, including on the potential benefits and harms of breast screening for women in this age group, is available to support their choice of whether or not to take up the offer of a re-screen. A patient leaflet is also available.
- Women who have or have had breast cancer and are concerned about how this incident affects them, and families of those who have died of breast cancer, will be able to access specialist clinical support provided by breast cancer charities, Macmillan and Breast Cancer Care, with whom we are working very closely.
- If they want to find out whether there may have been any harm done to them personally, women who were not invited for their final screen, and have or have had breast cancer, and the families of women affected who have died of breast cancer will be offered an individualised specialist assessment. This will consider whether or not the missed invitation could have altered when their cancer was diagnosed and whether, if it had been diagnosed earlier, this could have affected their treatment or prognosis.
- This assessment will inform NHS Duty of Candour conversations to apologise to any women who have been harmed by missing their final screen. This assessment will be offered through a dedicated service provided by specialist clinicians, and can be accessed via the **Helpline on 0800 169 2692**.
- Any women in the Age Extension trial who have been affected will be included in the Patient Notification Exercise.

We are doing all we can to handle this complex situation with sensitivity, to avoid unnecessary alarm to women, to offer the opportunity for re-screening, and to

apologise, both for the failure to invite women as they expected, and, as necessary, for any harm that has been caused as a result.

We have also been mindful of the need to effectively maintain routine healthcare throughout NHS services. The breast screening service in England remains a world leading service and we are grateful for the recent, urgent support that breast screening services have provided to serve women affected by these issues well.

We would ask for your support for the women who may approach you for advice.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read "Paul Cosford", with a horizontal line underneath.

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