



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála  
National Screening Service

15 February 2022

Deputy Holly Cairns  
[holly.cairns@oireachtas.ie](mailto:holly.cairns@oireachtas.ie)

Our Ref: HM/Communications

**PQ5169/22: To ask the Minister for Health if he will provide details on the retrospective audit that will be offered for persons affected by the CervicalCheck scandal; and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

Dear Deputy,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Question.

CervicalCheck has undertaken one retrospective clinical audit since the programme's foundation in 2008. All of the women or the families of women involved in that audit have received their audit results; the audit findings were also subject to an independent review. The findings of this independent review can be read [here](#). It is not expected that these persons will be offered a further retrospective audit, as per the deputy's question.

With this in mind, I take the deputy to be enquiring about the future provision of retrospective review (audit) of the results of women who have been with the programme since the time of the first audit, and have subsequently developed cancer (interval cancer). I trust that you are happy I proceed to answer that question.

### **The future of programmatic and patient led-reviews within the CervicalCheck programme**

In 2018 the government appointed UK public health expert Dr Gabriel Scally to undertake a review of the CervicalCheck programme. Dr Scally's Scoping Inquiry into the CervicalCheck Screening Programme 2018 made a number of key recommendations concerning governance, quality assurance and transparency in communication. It included the recommendation that common, robust and externally validated approaches to the design, conduct, evaluation and oversight of audits should be developed across the screening services.

The HSE completed this recommendation in October 2020 with the publication of the Expert Reference Group Interval Cancer Report (CervicalCheck) 2020. The report set out a new and comprehensive approach to reviews of interval cancers in people who have been screened by Ireland's cervical screening programme.

The National Screening Service (NSS) and CervicalCheck are acutely aware that the issues of CervicalCheck clinical audit non-disclosure led to a loss of trust in our services. We are aiming to rebuild that trust by working with patients to inform our planning and delivery of services, strengthening our governance, improving our information resources and enhancing our quality assurance processes.

Teach Óstaí an Rí, 200 Sráid Parnell, Baile Átha Cliath D01 A3Y8. King's Inn House, 200 Parnell Street, Dublin 1, D01 A3Y8.  
☎ 353 1 865 9300 ✉ [info@screeningservice.ie](mailto:info@screeningservice.ie) [www.screeningservice.ie](http://www.screeningservice.ie)



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála  
National Screening Service



An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Cioch  
The National Breast Screening Programme



AN CLÁR NÁISIÚNTA SCAGTHÁSTÁLA CERIBHEACS  
THE NATIONAL CERVICAL SCREENING PROGRAMME



An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Púitige  
The National Bowel Screening Programme



An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Riatróil do Diaibéitigh  
The National Diabetic Retinal Screening Programme



As part of that work we have undertaken to implement the ERG recommendations in full. In late 2020 we began designing a new process for how we perform and disclose look-back information to patients who develop an interval cancer.

Our programme of retrospective review is paused while we work to design our new review process. This process will support quality assurance within the programme and is in line with international best practice for cancer screening programmes.

We are taking time to get the new review process right. Membership of our working groups is diverse, including representatives from patient and public advocacy groups, primary care, cancer screening experts, public health, legal experts, communication specialists, medical ethics and health economics.

We are keen to engage with anyone who wishes to talk to us about our work. We are working together to create a truly patient-centred process for disclosing information on interval cancer in a way that minimises the harm felt for everyone.

Our website is updated with details of the implementation process. Our Year 1 implementation report is available [here](#). People do not need to take any action at present. We provide progress reports on implementation to anyone who registers with us on our information line, Freephone 1800 83 21 88, or by emailing [info@screeningservice.ie](mailto:info@screeningservice.ie). We are letting our participants know that when our new processes have been designed we will get in touch with people affected.

As part of the National Screening Service's work to promote a better understanding of the services we provide, we are making accurate information available to assist those writing and talking about our service and related issues. To assist in that purpose we have produced A Guide to Talking About Cervical Screening in Ireland, which you are welcome to access [here](#). The guide includes information on the first clinical audit and its outcomes, which provides background reading for your query.

I trust this information is of assistance to you, should you have any further queries please contact me.

Yours sincerely,

---

Fiona Murphy  
Chief Executive  
National Screening Service

