

## **Northern Ireland Training & Audit Requirements for Cervical Sample Takers**

As with any clinical procedure, all cervical sample takers need to be fully competent and appropriately trained to undertake this function. In addition, they need to understand their role and responsibilities in the wider screening programme and ensure that they keep up to date with the latest developments.

Cervical screening should only be provided by **doctors** (GMC Registered) or **nurses** (NMC Registered) who are registered to practice in the UK and have undertaken appropriate specialist training in line with NHS Cervical Screening Programme (NHSCSP) guidance.

Training is divided into two main areas, initial basic training and update training on a regular basis to maintain competency, review practice and update knowledge.

### **Initial Cervical Screening Training**

Nurses must successfully complete a recognised training course on cervical screening, which must include a theoretical element as well as a period of supervised practical training. Both elements of training must be in accordance with the guidelines in NHSCSP Good Practice Guide No. 2, (Interim, 2011) '*INTERIM Good Practice Guidance for cervical sample takers*' and NHSCSP Publication No. 23 (April 2006) '*Taking Samples for Cervical Screening – A Resource Pack for Trainers*'.

All doctors who are sample takers are expected to have completed an adequate level of theoretical and practical training as part of their specialist training curriculum. Doctors involved in cervical screening who are not formally trained in gynaecology or genitourinary medicine, or who have not received instructions in smear taking on a sexual and reproductive health course, are also recommended to undertake a recognized training course for cervical screening.

### **Maintaining Competence and Audit**

All sample takers should conduct continuous self- evaluation to ensure continuing competence in accordance with their professional codes of conduct. The process of

review should include assessing sample discrepancies, rejections and inadequate samples and monitoring patient satisfaction.

All sample takers are expected to undertake an **annual audit** of their individual rates of inadequate tests and abnormal test results compared with the rates reported by their local laboratory.

- It is recommended by the Public Health Agency that a nurse sample taker undertakes a minimum number of 20 cervical samples per year to maintain clinical competence and facilitate audit of practice.
- In the case of those GPs who have been trained in line with NHSCSP guidelines but who often screen very few women each year (less than 20), their individual audit should cover all the samples taken and reflect the reason for the samples being taken (eg non/lapsed attenders screened opportunistically).

### **Update Training Recommendations**

The NHSCSP recommends that **all cervical sample takers** (both nurses and doctors) should undertake a minimum of one half day's update training on programme developments every **three years**.

### **Sample Taker Return to Practice**

It is the sample taker's responsibility to ensure they are competent and up to date with the cervical screening programme. If a sample taker has had a period of not practicing (usually more than a year) they should take all reasonable steps to access training and/or ask for supervision and observation to ensure that they have sufficient knowledge and skills to start taking samples again.

### **Accountability**

Section 13 (under preserve safety) of The Code (Nursing and Midwifery Council's 2015) states that a Nurse must 'recognise and work within the limits of your competence, that you must complete the necessary training before carrying out a new role'.

The General Medical Council states that as a doctor registered with the GMC, you are required to keep up-to-date and maintain your skills in all clinical aspects of general practice. It is your professional obligation to make a judgement about what training you need to undertake to do this, and you should be able to defend this if necessary.

Further details on training can be found at:

Royal College of Nursing, Cervical Screening RCN Guidance for Good Practice, Revised July 2013. (<https://www.rcn.org.uk/professional-development/publications/pub-003105>)

NHS Cancer Screening Programmes, NHS CSP Good Practice Guide no. 2, INTERIM Good Practice Guidance for Cervical Sample Takers, July 2011.

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cervical-screening-good-practice-in-cervical-sample-taking>)

NHS Cancer Screening Programmes, NHS CSP Publication no. 23, Taking Samples for Cervical Screening - A resource pack for trainers, April 2006

*Produced by the Northern Ireland Quality Assurance Reference Centre (QARC), Public Health Agency, in collaboration with the Regional Quality Assurance Group for Primary Care.*