



WARRINGTON, HALTON, ST. HELENS & KNOWSLEY
BREAST SCREENING SERVICE

9 August 2011

Press Release

Important new developments at local Breast Screening Programme will greatly improve service to women and improve the outcome of women diagnosed with breast cancer.

The Warrington, Halton, St Helens & Knowsley Breast Screening Programme has announced several major new developments to be implemented from September this year.

In December 2007 the Department of Health announced that the NHS Breast Screening Programme would be extended from 2010 to cover women between the ages of 47 and 73. The Programme presently invites all women between the ages of 50-70. This means that all women will receive two extra screening invitations in their lifetime. It also means that they will receive their first screening invitation before their 50th birthday.

The Cancer Reform Strategy also announced that the age extension would be rolled out in parallel with breast screening's conversion from film-based to digital x-ray systems.

In response to these requirements Warrington & Halton Hospitals NHS Trust, who host the local programme, has been working hard to ensure that these recommendations can be put into place as soon as possible and are delighted to report that a major project will take place during August/early September which will allow the phased introduction of age extension from September 2011.

The age extension roll-out will be gradually phased in across England. Initially the programme will invite just some of the women from the new age groups. Eventually all women in the new age range will be invited.

The female population that falls within the new screening age groups of 47-49 and 71-73 will be randomised which will mean that initially the age extension will only affect half of the women in these age groups. Phasing in the age extension in this way will mean that the benefits of extending the age range can be carefully evaluated.

At the same time the Trust has invested £ ½ million and approved a programme of works to replace all of the old analogue equipment with state-of-the-art digital x-ray sets as recommended by the Department of Health.

A brand new mobile unit with digital equipment has been ordered to replace the two elderly trailers currently in use. The mobile unit will be used to screen women from St Helens, Widnes, Runcorn, Frodsham & Helsby. The Programme has been working with staff at the local Primary Care Trusts to identify suitable sites and are pleased to have been able to identify a new site at the Fingerpost Park Health Centre in Atlas Street, St Helens which will be able to accommodate the new digital mobile unit.

Existing sites in Highfield Park Hospital, Widnes, Halton Hospital and the Rock Surgery in Frodsham will also be used as and when required. The site at Garven Place in Warrington will be replaced in 2012 with a screening facility inside the new health centre development at Sankey Baths which has been commissioned by NHS Warrington

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women and regular screening prevents deaths in women from breast cancer. Breast screening uses x-rays to look for breast cancers when they are too small to be seen or felt. Screening can find cancer early and the earlier breast cancer is found, the better the chance of surviving it.

Improving the technology by replacing the old, analogue equipment with new digital x-ray systems will result in more detailed, clearer images which will contribute to early diagnosis.

Extending the age range of women who will receive breast screening invitations will also result in the diagnosis of more breast cancers at an earlier stage.

Dr Dympna Ewards, Interim Director of Public Health for NHS Halton & St Helens PCT said *"This is wonderful news. More women are to be invited for breast screening, and the equipment used is much improved. Most women invited go for screening, and eight out of every thousand go on to have treatment. Because screening catches cancer early, the treatment is so much more effective. These improvements to screening will save local women's lives"*.

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