

**Pathway to invite women with learning disabilities into a GP surgery for cervical screening.**

1. Practice nurse and Learning Disability nurse **identify** women with learning disabilities who are eligible for cervical screening from the GP practice register.
  
2. Practice nurse and Learning Disability nurse **invite** patient into the surgery for a preparatory discussion to prepare the women about having a sample test.
  
3. Preparatory session will include:
  - Offer appropriate information to women and their carers to enable them to understand the risk factors for cervical cancer and about the cervical screening process using easy to understand leaflets and booklets.
  - Ascertain consent and be clear about how to proceed when someone is not able to consent verbally (DOH guidelines, NHS Cancer Screening Programme guidelines and appendix 1).
  - Assess if the women have any anxiety or physical needs that would be a barrier to the cervical screening process.
  - Women who present with **communication difficulties** that are a **barrier** to them understanding and consenting to the smear process should be referred to the Speech and Language therapy team at the Specialist Learning Disability team. This is for intervention to assess their level of understanding and how to proceed if the woman is not able to give clear verbal consent.
  - Women who present with **anxiety** that is a **barrier** to them understanding and consenting to the cervical screening process should be referred to the Specialist Learning Disability team for support and desensitisation.
  
4. When a patient fails to attend an appointment the Practice nurse or LD nurse will follow up the reason why.
  
5. If the patient requires a home visit this will be offered.
  
6. When seeking patient capacity to consent the DOH guidance 25754: 'Seeking consent: working with people with learning disabilities' and the Mental Capacity Act 2007 is adhered to. The nurse will refer the patient to the Doctor if a 'Best interests' decision is required.

7. **Outcomes of face to face contact with ALL patients must be recorded within a patient's medical notes as per GP surgery policy and procedure.**

8. **Support and advice is available from:**

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- **Debbie Johnstone,**  
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***Reference:***

- Equal Access to Breast & Cervical Screening for Disabled Women. Cancer Screening Series No 2. March 2006.
- Seeking Consent: working with people with learning disabilities. DOH 25754

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **The following points should be considered when assessing a woman with learning disabilities capacity to consent to cervical screening:**

- 1. Does the woman have a basic understanding of what cervical screening is, its purpose and why she has been invited?**
- 2. Does she understand that the test does not always find that something is wrong?**
- 3. Does she understand that a positive test result will mean having more tests?**
- 4. Is she able to retain the information for long enough to make an effective decision?**
- 5. Is she able to make a free choice (ie free from pressure from supporters or health professionals)?**

**Some women with severe learning disabilities may not have the capacity to give informed consent to cervical screening, even after careful preparation. In such cases, screening may proceed on the basis of behavioural consent. This means that the woman:**

- 1. Cooperates with the screening process**
- 2. Is not unduly anxious**
- 3. Responds to simple requests, such as getting undressed**
- 4. Is willing to be positioned**
- 5. Does not show undue agitation or distress.**

**If a woman appears to be withdrawing behavioural consent for screening at any point during the process then the test should be ceased and the reasons documented in the woman's notes. She should be given another routine screening appointment in three to five years' time, as normal. Withholding or withdrawal of behavioural consent prior to the screening appointment may also apply if a woman is clearly reluctant or refuses to attend. There are some instances in which a woman's disability may make the cervical screening test either difficult or impossible to carry out.**

**References:**

- Equal Access to Breast Screening for Disabled Women. NHS Cancer Screening Programmes. NHS Cancer Screening Series No 2. March 2006.
- Seeking Consent: working with people with learning disabilities. DOH 25754