

BREAST SCREENING FOR WOMEN WITH A FAMILY HISTORY OF BREAST CANCER

An evaluation funded by the NHS Research and Development Programme.

INFORMATION FOR PRIMARY CARE

The importance of breast screening

In the UK, 1 in 9 women develops breast cancer at some time in her life. Screening by mammography finds early changes that often cannot be seen or felt. Early diagnosis offers the best chance of full recovery. Most cases of breast cancer detected early are successfully treated with the modern treatments now available. Screening does not prevent cancer and like most tests is not 100% accurate. This means that some cancers may not be detected. It also means that some women may receive unnecessary investigations and/or procedures.

Who is offered screening?

The NHS Breast Screening Programme invites all women in the UK between the ages of 50 and 64 for screening mammography every three years. Breast cancer is more common in women over 50 than in younger women (approximately 4 out of 5 women diagnosed with breast cancer are over 50) and screening with mammography has been proven to be effective in this age group. Invitations will continue to be offered up to the age of 70.

Women with a family history of breast cancer

Women with a family history of breast cancer may benefit from starting regular mammography earlier than 50. In order to investigate whether this practice is beneficial or not the NHS Research and Development Programme have funded a large prospective evaluation of regular mammography in women under 50 with a family history of breast cancer.

Eligible women will be offered annual mammography in their local breast care clinic from the age of 40, until they become eligible for the National Programme.

Results will be sent by post within 3 weeks to each woman, and a copy sent to their primary care team. If the mammogram shows an abnormality, the woman will be recalled directly for further assessment, including possible biopsy at the breast clinic.

Women entering this evaluation give written consent after reading the information leaflet 'Breast Screening for Women with a Family History of Breast Cancer'. They agree to personal information being stored in a database held on behalf of the NHS by Breast Test Wales in Cardiff. Only anonymous data will be released by Breast Test Wales to research teams involved in the evaluation.

This evaluation will produce evidence to the NHS, which will be reported to the National Screening Committee. If that evidence shows no benefit, the National Screening Committee reserves the right to advise the NHS that regular screening mammography should not be offered to women under 50.