

Breast screening review at East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust

East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust has confirmed that an independent review of breast screening assessment clinics has resulted in a number of women being recalled for further assessment. A small number of these women also needed further treatment.

Rineke Schram, Medical Director of East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust, said: "On behalf of the Trust, I would like to apologise for any distress and anxiety this incident has caused."

A thorough and independent review of breast screening assessment clinics was carried out by the regional Quality Assurance team following concerns raised, relating to one consultant radiologist's work at the Trust. This independent review has been completed and the results are now being reported publicly.

This incident relates only to a small number of women called back to an individual radiologist's breast screening assessment clinics following potential abnormalities found on their initial screening mammograms.

The problems were identified through internal monitoring within the breast screening service and, after an immediate preliminary internal review, the findings were escalated to the Trust's Medical Director. The Regional Director of the Breast Screening Quality Assurance Programme was then contacted who initiated an independent investigation. A specialist independent team have undertaken a thorough review of all breast screening assessments carried out by the individual consultant radiologist during the past three years.

A total of 355 women's mammograms were reassessed throughout the review. Out of these, 85 were invited to attend special clinics, where their cases were reviewed by senior consultants in conjunction with the regional quality assurance team and supported by specialist Breast Care nurses.

Fourteen women have been diagnosed with invasive breast cancer as a result of this review and are undergoing treatment.

Four further women have been diagnosed with a condition known as ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS). This means that abnormal cells are present in the milk ducts of the breast, but have not spread into other breast tissue. The delay in detecting these cells will not affect these women's prognosis.

The assessment investigations of all women who were originally seen by the radiologist concerned in the last breast screening cycle have been reviewed, so no further breast screening reviews are necessary. The review was carried out by two

East Lancashire Hospitals consultant radiologists, in conjunction with the regional Breast Screening Quality Assurance team.

The consultant radiologist concerned has not worked since April 2009, and has not carried out breast screening assessment work since December 2008.

The work of the Trust's other breast screening radiologists has been independently assessed and found to be of a high standard, establishing that the issue related solely to the individual radiologist concerned.

East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust will be commissioning a further independent review to provide further assurance and ensure lessons are learned for all NHS organisations.

Commissioned by East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust, this review will involve Commissioning PCTs, the North West Regional Breast Screening Quality Assurance Programme and the North West Strategic Health Authority.

Rineke Schram, Medical Director of East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust, said: "The women involved are being kept fully informed of the situation. Any women who may be concerned should not hesitate to contact our helpline for further advice.

"I would like to reassure all women who visit East Lancashire Hospitals for initial mammograms that our concerns relate only to the secondary tests following screening by one individual doctor.

"All women considered by the North West Breast Screening Quality Assurance Team to be at possible risk have been identified and contacted. Anyone who has not been contacted by the Trust can be assured that their breast screening assessment results are not affected by this.

"As a result of this incident, the Trust has reviewed and scrutinised all guidelines and processes in the breast screening and assessment service, ensuring they are as robust as possible.

"We appointed a new Director of Breast Screening in September last year, and the service performs extremely well, exceeding all government targets for cancer detection."

Dr Ellis Friedman, the Regional Director of the Breast Screening Quality Assurance Programme commented: "The National Health Service Breast Screening Programme (NHSBSP) is committed to the achievement of the highest standards of performance and it is always a concern when one of its programmes fails to achieve these standards for all women.

"In this incident in East Lancashire, 18 women have had their cancer diagnosed later than should have been the case.

"The incident team, which I chaired, has thoroughly reviewed the incident and will ensure that lessons will be learned.

"The public will wish to know if the service is safe, and I can confirm that the East Lancashire programme is meeting all the important quality and outcome standards set by the national programme."

A helpline is now open daily from 7am to 10pm, on 01254 732093, and will remain open for as long as required as well as a dedicated email address: screening.helpline@elht.nhs.uk.