NORTHERN HEALTH AND

SOCIAL CARE TRUST

BREAST SCREENING PROGRAMME

ANNUAL REPORT 2011/2012
INTRODUCTION

This report provides a summary of the data and service issues for the Northern Breast Screening Programme for the year 2011/2012.

The aim of the Screening Programme is the early detection of breast cancer to enable early treatment and to increase survival. The NHS plan and the National Cancer plan identified there should be a phased extension of the Breast Screening Programme to include women up to the age of 70 and this began in Northern Ireland in late March/early April 2009. Currently all women between the ages of 50 and 70 are routinely invited for breast screening every 3 years. Before 2009 screening was only offered for women aged 50 to 65.

The information and service update provided in this report, facilitates a review of important aspects of service quality. As with all screening programmes, high standards need to be maintained to minimise incorrect results and derive the benefits from early detection of disease. Particularly in the current media climate and the recent report published in the Lancet it remains particularly important that we inform women about screening to allow them to assess the balance of risks and benefits so that their choice to attend for screening is made within the setting of informed consent.

NORTHERN BREAST SCREENING SERVICE

The Northern Health and Social Care Trust provides the Breast Screening Service for the majority of women in the former Northern Board Area. Mammograms are offered in 2 Mobile Mammography Units and assessment facilities provided in the Breast Imaging Unit in the Antrim Area Hospital site.

PERFORMANCE OF THE PROGRAMME

In 2011/2012, 15,058 ladies were offered an invitation for screening with over 11,822 attending. The overall uptake rate for ages 50 – 70 was 77.16%. This value remains well above the minimum standard of 70% and approaches the target of 80%. These figures should be viewed within the context of Northern Ireland as a whole where uptake is below the target of 80%. The Northern Trust continues to maintain its place as a Unit with highly placed uptake rates within both Northern Ireland and the UK as
a whole. We continue in an attempt to maintain and improve our excellent uptake rate and have undertaken a programme of activities to promote informed consent and improve uptake among all sections of our clientele. We have undertaken specific activity in areas of consistent reduced uptake and also within practices with a high proportion of foreign nationals where uptake is also low.

The programme round length was maintained generally at 36 months, however to recreate work undertaken prior to age extension in 2009 necessitated a phased slip to 38 months for 4 practices in Cookstown and Magherafelt. This was undertaken with full disclosure and agreement of QARC.

OUTCOMES OF THE SCREENING PROGRAMME

The results of the Northern Trust Screening Programme show that the service is in line with National Standards. In 2010/2011 the recall rate for prevalent screen was 13% which was above the minimum target of 10%. In 2011/2012 this value has reduced to 11%. We continue to monitor this on a regular basis and have seen continued reduction in this rate in the first two quarters of 2012/2013. The screening to results and screening to assessment times have both maintained the high standards achieved in 2010/2011 with 98% and 99% respectively. Both are well above the 90% minimum standard and approaching the 100% target.

A total of 583 ladies were recalled for assessment. 67 invasive cancers were detected and 29 patients with ductal carcinoma in situ. In the yearly statistical review, all values related to cancer detection exceeded the target values set by the National Health Service Breast Screening Programme (see appendix 1).

Pre-operative diagnosis rates remain consistently above the 90% target at 94.81%. This is no doubt supported by the Units exclusive use of vacuum biopsy and assessment of microcalcifications and mammogram only asymmetric densities or nodules.

In November 2011 the Unit underwent the 3 yearly, compulsory, external quality assurance visit. The outcome of this visit and the official report were both extremely positive regarding the high quality service offered within the Unit. No major issues were raised. The Unit was commended for scintigraphy based sentinel lymph node biopsy the capacity to offer both immediate and delayed reconstruction within the surgical unit. We continue to work with the Quality Assurance Reference Centre and Trust management at the subsequent follow up sessions to work through some of the minor issues raised, particularly those with regard to staffing issues.

SERVICE ISSUES

Two new, high quality, ultrasound machines were purchased in April 2011. The ongoing concern with regard to equipment and service delivery remains however the risk of failure of analogue mammography and wet processing. We are currently
engaging in the regional business case for the implementation of digital mammography within the Breast Screening Service. Realistically it will probably be early 2014 before mobile trailers and digital mammography equipment are delivered. With this in mind, the Trust recently purchased a replacement wet processing unit which was delivered in August 2012 which should continue to support the Screening Programme and analogue mammography until digital mammography has been implemented.

A FORWARD LOOK

The main challenge to the future of the Breast Screening Programme in the Northern Trust will be the implementation of digital mammography screening equipment. Moving from analogue mammography to full digital mammography, with the training and IT issues involved, will be a challenge to all the staff within the Unit to ensure that the round length does not exceed 36 months or the day to day service provision within the Units be impaired.

The proposed implementation of MRI surveillance for women of high risk of developing breast cancer, which is proposed to begin in Northern Ireland in April 2013 under the quality control auspices of the National Breast Screening Programme, will also be a challenge which the radiology and radiography teams at Antrim Area Hospital are eager to embrace. We currently undertake a limited amount of MRI breast surveillance and also use breast MRI as both a pre-operative and problem solving tool. We are currently the only Unit in Northern Ireland offering MRI guided biopsy and believe we are in a unique position to take forward the provision of MRI surveillance from April 2013.

Director of Breast Screening
Dr Tracey O’Neill
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