

MLSA Statement on CervicalCheck

3rd May 2018

The Medical Laboratory Scientists' Association (MLSA) is deeply saddened by the impact of the system failures of CervicalCheck on individual women, including the very brave Vicky Phelan, and on public confidence in the cervical screening programme. The screening programme has saved lives and has contributed to a drop of 7% in deaths from cervical cancer but it is now clear that it did not operate to necessary standards in terms of audit and communication.

The MLSA warned the HSE and the National Cancer Screening Service (NCSS) in 2007-2008 of the risks of the short-term decision to outsource testing to the USA, due to the different testing and screening protocols in place and the disconnect between the outsourced screening programme and the clinical services for women subsequently diagnosed with cervical cancer in Ireland. Concern was also expressed about the loss to the State of the skills to provide the service. As a result of the outsourcing of the testing, over sixty highly skilled medical scientists performing cytology testing in Ireland were redeployed to other areas in pathology laboratories, with a consequent loss of their skills; as a result, most Irish laboratories were not and are not in a position to tender for subsequent NCSS contracts for the work.

The MLSA welcomes the upcoming review into the service and calls on the HSE to invest in the retraining and upskilling of medical scientists so that the testing service can be returned to Ireland as soon as possible. Our members hope that lessons have been learned by the HSE of the need to invest in Irish clinical pathology laboratories properly so that such vital diagnostic services can be provided within the state in accredited laboratories with adequate links to clinical services.