

## **Statement from 221+ Patient Support Group re RCOG review aggregate report**

The release today of the aggregate report on the work of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) comes with varying emotions for the members of the 221+ patient support group.

It is a relief firstly that there is now an outcome to this delayed process. For many personally, it answers questions and provides some closure. For others it doesn't complete the story but gives more information which we hope will help lead them to something better. For a number regrettably it has not been a good experience.

We acknowledge the efforts made by RCOG and by the HSE to engage patient advocates with planning both the conduct and the communication of the Review. It is telling that even with that approach and intent on their parts, there were still problems. This highlights the depth of the challenge for our health system to turn around a legacy of poor practices and poor patient communication.

Our immediate concern now is to provide reliable and confidential information, advice and support to the 250\* added women and families who are dealing with the impacts on their lives of a newly confirmed failure in screening. We would encourage anyone impacted and who needs help to get in touch through the 221+ website ([221plus.ie](http://221plus.ie)) where we will do what we can to address the issues arising for them out of their experience.

It is important to note that the RCOG Review highlights the importance for women that they continue to participate in screening. Notwithstanding the individual failures of CervicalCheck, the Review confirms evidence of a sustained reduction in incidences of cervical cancer in Ireland following the introduction of screening. Put simply, screening saves lives.

221+ will thus continue to be advocates for and contributors to ensuring improvements in the cervical screening programme and in the systems of care for women's health in Ireland generally. It is important that society, and the media in particular, doesn't think that the fallout from this debacle is now over. There is still much to be done to ensure adequate standards of governance and management in those systems, and before women will have confidence in the capacity and the readiness of Irish healthcare to communicate and engage effectively to their needs.

To that end, we will continue to take a very active role and interest in the CervicalCheck Steering Committee set up in September 2018 to take responsibility for implementation of the Scally report just then published. Suggestions that this structure was no longer required and could be dismantled circulated as early as January of this year. In the time since we have had the second Scally Report, the MacCraith Review of communications practices and now this delayed RCOG Review.

That steering structure, with its obligation to continual reporting and publication of progress, is as important today as it was fifteen months ago, if not more so. This a point we will continue to emphasise to all parties – appointed and elected.

For today however the focus is to help individual women and their families. We are concentrating our immediate efforts on ensuring that they get the support and attention that they need in the first instance, reflecting the principle of 'Women First' in practice.

\*the figure of 308 women whose slides were found by the RCOG Review to be discordant with their original screening result includes 58 women already within the 221+ cohort.