

‘ASK THE EXPERT’

PROTOCOLS AND GUIDELINES

Background

Ask The Expert provides women with cervical abnormalities or cervical cancer the opportunity to receive clarification about their diagnosis, treatment and concerns from either a healthcare professional or, where appropriate, a member of the Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust team. The service is offered free to registered and non registered service users of Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust.

This unique and greatly valued service (established in 2002) has continued to be popular. At times there have been great demands on the medical panel which support the service and we anticipate that from time to time there will be an increase in submissions due perhaps to awareness of the charity or a news article.

This growth, coupled with the charity changing its name to Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust and its legal set up to an 'incorporated charity' in 2010 resulted in our assessing and formalising certain areas of our work. This will ensure our services are well managed, appropriately evaluated and that we can demonstrate effectiveness and benefit to current and new panel members, our trustees and potential funders. This will in turn allow continuing improvement of our services (current and planned), through measurable goals.

For our Ask The Expert service, guidelines and protocols have been produced which outline the roles of Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust and the medical panel in ensuring the service runs smoothly and effectively. The growth in the service also highlighted the need to increase the number of members on our medical panel and streamline the process of dealing with submissions to make it more efficient.

The charity is very grateful for the many hours the medical panel contribute to answering submissions throughout the year and we want to ensure we do not unnecessarily take up too much of this time with questions we may be able to answer directly, such as "what are the symptoms of cervical cancer?".

A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE SERVICE

Service users fill in a questionnaire online via our website and submit it to Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust. Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust sends an email to let the service user know their submission has been received.

Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust assesses whether very simple questions can be answered with our online information and Frequently Asked Questions sections on our website with the option for the service user, once they have read the material, to submit a further, more specific question to the medical panel. All our online information is checked by medical professionals and regularly reviewed and is Information Standards accredited (<http://www.theinformationstandard.org/>).

Appropriate questions that do not fall under the above category are forwarded from Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust to a member of the medical panel for response. The member of the medical panel aims to return the response to Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust within a reasonable time (generally between 1-4 days). The response is then forwarded from Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust to the service user.

For a description of the full process, please see pages 3-5

EXPECTATIONS – JO'S CERVICAL CANCER TRUST

- We will only send the medical panel appropriate submissions (where possible, we will try to match the query with the field of expertise each panel member has).
- We will endeavour to send no more than two submissions in any one week (subject to demand).
- Any submissions sent to the medical panel will be anonymous.
- The medical panel response to the submission will be forwarded anonymously back to the service user.
- We will, where possible, give the medical panel advance warning of any anticipated increase in use of the service.
- We will provide the medical panel with any relevant information about Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust.
- We will be available for the medical panel to discuss any concerns it may have about a submission or the service in general.
- If there is a need for clarification of an answer, Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust will contact the panellist before forwarding the response to the person who submitted the question.

EXPECTATIONS – JO'S CERVICAL CANCER TRUST MEDICAL PANEL

Your participation in 'Ask the Expert' is given on a volunteer basis and does not constitute an employment relationship with the charity.

You agree:

- To act professionally and within GMC guidelines at all times.
- That all responses will be based on the information received as you will not have seen medical records or the enquirer.
- To provide answers directly relevant to the question within the submission and be based on evidence when available.
- To seek to clarify information on the diagnosis and treatment of cervical cancer and cervical abnormalities and medically related conditions.
- That responses should be based on the condition rather than the individual where possible.
- To avoid recommending or endorsing drugs, surgery or treatments. (However, it is perfectly acceptable to give an account of all the current options of treatment available to someone in the service user's position).

- To avoid openly criticising other medical professionals.
- If you are concerned about the advice a service user is receiving from their current healthcare professional, please contact Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust directly to raise this concern.
- To always encourage service users to seek further advice from either their GP or other healthcare professionals.
- If you receive a submission that you recognise is from a patient of yours, to return it to the charity

The overall aim of the service is to provide information and options rather than recommendations.

INSURANCE

Although the risk is very low, Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust has organised Medical Malpractice Insurance, which protects the charity in the highly unlikely event that an individual should choose to take action as a result of information they received from a submission. This policy includes clauses whereby all Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust panellists need to confirm they have appropriate registrations/insurances in place. See Appendix 1

****DECLARATION****

By acknowledging receipt of these Protocols and Guidelines and agreeing to become and acting as a Panel member you agree that you have read, understood and will adhere at all times to the Guidelines and Protocols that are contained in this document and confirm that you have and will maintain the relevant registrations/insurances as outlined in Appendix 1 for as long as you are a Panel member.

MEDICAL SUBMISSIONS PROCESS

1 - PROCESS FOR USERS TO SUBMIT A MEDICAL SUBMISSION

All medical questions from the general public are submitted through the "Ask The Expert section" on the Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust website. This section also includes a list of panel members and where they are based. We do not provide addresses or telephone numbers.

Users are given instructions about how to submit a question and reminded that "Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust encourages them to seek appropriate professional medical advice or care for any situation or problem that you may have".

They are directed to:

The Submission Form – where they are asked to enter their name, email address, age, the subject of their question, a brief history and their question.

The Disclaimer – which they have to read and accept before submitting a question.

It states:

"The content of Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust website is for information purposes only. Although the expert medical panel will seek to answer issues raised via the Ask The Expert section, any information obtained from us, through our website or via the medical panel is for information purposes only and should not be used or relied upon for diagnosing or treating any health problem. The content of our website and information provided from the medical panel is not intended to be a

substitute for one to one to professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment from your healthcare professional. Always seek the advice of your doctor or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition. Never disregard professional medical advice or delay in seeking it because of content found on our website or information given by our expert panel or because you are waiting for a response to an enquiry. If you are in any doubt as to whether you may need medical attention, call your doctor or if urgent advice or treatment is required the emergency services.

By submitting a request for information you agree that our expert medical panel will provide any information strictly and only on the basis that no responsibility or liability whatsoever (whether direct, indirect, consequential, special, exemplary, or otherwise) is accepted by us for the accuracy or reliability of any such information obtained, or for the consequences of relying on it, whether such information be provided negligently, recklessly, fraudulently or otherwise howsoever."

At the bottom of the Submission Form, members are asked to confirm that they have read the Disclaimer:

"Please click here to confirm that you have read and agreed to the Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust Disclaimer for use of the Ask The Expert facility. By making a submission you are agreeing to the Disclaimer and accepting that you have no right of recourse in respect of any information obtained or the use to which it may be put. I have read and agree to the above"

Once a question has been formally submitted through the Submission Form, they are then directed to the message below and an automatic email is then sent to Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust;

"Thank you for your submission to our Ask The Expert service, which will now be forwarded to our medical panel. Every effort will be made to ensure that you receive a reply from the panel as soon as possible. Please note that due to increased numbers using the service, it may take a little longer to respond to you than normal. Thank you for your patience and understanding in this matter."

2 - PROCESS IN DEALING WITH SUBMISSIONS SENT TO JO'S CERVICAL CANCER TRUST:

Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust receives an automated email from the service user containing the medical submission form. All details, which are entered into a tracking spreadsheet, are kept confidential. They assist us in being able to manage the growth of the service in terms of understanding needs, demographics and type of health professional to recruit for the panel.

Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust sends an email to the service user within the first 24 hours, where possible. Where appropriate we will either seek to gain further information if the information provided is insufficient (in order to help the panel provide the best response), or, guide them to information on our web pages or forum, which may help them whilst they wait for an answer from the panel.

In cases where the question is very straightforward e.g. "what is HPV?", "What will happen when I go for cervical screening?", "What happens at a colposcopy?" we will initially guide the service user to the appropriate information contained in our web pages with encouragement to submit a further question if they are still unsure. This can be particularly helpful to us when the service is very busy. This ensures that the panel are answering specific concerns and questions and that the service user can gain access to basic information immediately without having to wait.

With questions that require a response from the panel, Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust will seek to match the questions with the most appropriate health professional to ensure the best use of their skills, thus securing the most meaningful answer for the service user. Occasionally, when the service is particularly busy, we may need to send submissions outside of this framework.

All identifiable information is removed from the submission before it is sent to the medical panel. This ensures that the service is anonymous.

If a member of the panel recognises the submission as one of their patients, it is advisable that they return the submission so that it can be sent to another member of the panel.

3- PROCESS IN DEALING WITH PANEL RESPONSES TO SUBMISSIONS

Once Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust receives a response from the panel, we send a reply to the service user, including their original submission. In addition we add a salutation from the charity, include a disclaimer sentence before adding the response from the medical panel and insert a disclaimer at the end of the response. An example of what a response to a user looks like is:

"Dear Sally

I have received a response for you from a member of our panel. I hope their comments are helpful. Please do let me know if there is anything further that we can help with.

Kind regards,
Rebecca

Rebecca Shoosmith
Head of Support Services, Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust

Dear Sally

In reply, given the information provided and without access to medical notes or the benefit of a personal examination.

[The information given by the health professional is inserted here]

Best wishes
The Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust Medical Panel

Note:

Any information contained in this email is subject to the terms of use of the Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust web site, is for information purposes only and should not be used for diagnosing or treating any health problem. The information from the medical panel is not intended to be a substitute for one to one professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always seek the advice of your doctor or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition. Never disregard professional advice or delay in seeking it because of information given by our expert panel. If you are in any doubt as to whether you may need medical attention, call your doctor or, if urgent advice or treatment is required, the emergency services."

POINTS FOR THE PANEL TO REMEMBER WHEN RESPONDING TO A SUBMISSION

- The answer the medical panel provides is taken word for word from the response we receive from you. **We do not change the wording in any way** other than to correct spelling or grammar. You may want to bear this in mind when constructing a response.

- We no longer provide the name of the specific panellist with their response. Whilst a full list of the panel is available on our website, we believe that it is beneficial to the panel to retain a degree of anonymity.
- We respectfully ask that panel members only provide a response to the specific question submitted by the service user, in order to avoid providing information that may cause unnecessary concern.
- If the response from the medical panel is addressed to Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust rather than the user e.g. Sally, we will change the panel response to say "Dear Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust, I would suggest Sally". Therefore, we ask if possible that responses refer directly to the service user as this has a more personal feel.
- We look to provide information and options, not recommendations.

Note: We track and retain all communications between both Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust and the service user, and Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust and the medical panel to ensure correct procedures are followed.

APPENDIX 1

MEDICAL INSURANCE

Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust has Medical Malpractice Insurance, which protects the charity in the highly unlikely event that an individual should choose to take action as a result of information they received from a submission.

To ensure the charity's medical malpractice insurance is valid, all Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust panellists need to confirm they have appropriate registrations/insurances in place as outlined below. By agreeing to become and acting as a panellist you are confirming that you have and will maintain such registrations and insurance policies.

UK Medical Defence Organisation Clause

For all Registered Medical Practitioners:

- (a) maintain registration with the General Medical Council, and
- (b) maintain membership of a Medical Defence Organisation and that the category of such membership is applicable to all services offered or provided to you, or
- (c) are otherwise fully insured for their own malpractice and professional errors, omissions or negligence.

Nurse Indemnity Clause

For all Nurses:

- (a) maintain registration with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), and
- (b) maintain membership of the Royal College of Nursing or any other professional trade union which provides professional liability insurance as a benefit of membership and that such membership is applicable to all services offered or provided to you, or

(c) are otherwise fully insured for their own malpractice and professional errors, omissions or negligence.

All Medical Professionals

All medical professionals including oncologists, pathologists, epidemiologists and surgeons maintain their own malpractice insurance and professional errors, omissions or negligence.

* This insurance covers the charity not each individual panel member and so it important that all Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust panel members check with their relevant insurance in regard to their own personal cover.