

We speak to Consultant Gynaecologist Mr Ahmed Talaat working at Nuffield Health Plymouth Hospital...

Mr Ahmed Talaat joined Plymouth Hospitals in 2012 as a consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist and Sub-specialist in Gynaecological Oncology surgery. He successfully obtained his dual CCT GMC accreditation following a structured training in general Obstetrics and Gynaecology since 1996 both nationally and internationally. Subsequently, Mr Talaat has been awarded his accredited fellowship in Gynaecological cancer surgery in 2011. He has been actively involved in the surgical management of women with gynaecological cancer and early detection of ovarian, uterine (womb), cervical, vulval and vaginal cancer.



The number of women who have died from cervical cancer has decreased by almost three-quarters in the UK since the 1970s, which is fantastic – what has contributed to this dramatic fall in numbers?

Cervical Screening Programme saves 5,000 lives a year in the UK. Each year around five million women in the UK are invited for cervical screening (smear test) between the ages of 25 and 64. Women aged 25–49 are invited every three years and women aged 50–64 are invited every five years. This test contributed to the significant fall in the number of women who have died from cervical cancer over the last few decades. The main reason is that it can help to find precancerous cervical abnormalities before they are able to develop into cervical cancer.

You are now offering early cancer screening at Nuffield Health Plymouth Hospital – can you tell us a little more about that service?

“Gynaecological cancer” is a term which is used to refer to cancers that start in a woman’s reproductive system including ovaries, womb, vulva and vagina. These cancers combined are the UK’s third largest cancer killer of women and have a devastating effect on women and their families. Gynaecological cancers do not discriminate and can affect women at any age. *The screening and early detection package for Gynaecological cancer*, which is being offered by the Nuffield Health Plymouth Hospital, is determined to change this by diagnosing cancer early and treating it successfully in its early stages. You will be assessed via clinical examination, ultrasound examination and blood tests. This assessment, through

three consultations, will almost certainly give you reassurance and peace of mind.

We have heard reports in the news recently that the number of women having smear tests to screen for cervical cancer has dropped – why do you think this is?

This is true!! According to the NHS statistics in 2016, screening in women aged 25 to 64 was at 72.7% this March - down from 73.5% last year. The figure is the lowest for almost two decades. The figures also show big regional differences, with 67% of women in London getting tested compared to 76% in the East Midlands. If we do not start to immediately reverse declining coverage then tragically we will see more cervical cancer diagnosed and lives lost from what is a largely preventable disease. One of the main reasons of this drop is the lack of awareness about the value of cervical smear test in reducing the number of women diagnosed with cervical cancer. Targeted awareness and education campaigns at both a national and local level must be a priority alongside making screening more accessible. Most women, especially younger women, experience a great deal of anxiety before going for a smear test, and some women even end up cancelling the appointment out of fear. Most of the fears and anxieties associated with a cervical smear testing can be alleviated with a little bit of education and information.

Are there early symptoms we should look out for that might suggest abnormalities, or certain groups of women who are more prone to developing cervical cancer?

There are some recognised symptoms associated with cervical cancer that you should be aware of. These include;

Abnormal bleeding: during or after sexual intercourse, or between periods, post menopausal bleeding: if you are not on hormone replacement therapy (HRT) or have stopped it for six weeks or more, unusual vaginal discharge, discomfort or pain during sexual intercourse, lower back pain.

While high-risk HPV is the cause of 99.7% of all cervical cancers, there are other factors that increase your risk of developing the disease. These risk factors can be broken down into three different groups:

- Not attending cervical smear test: it has been estimated that in the UK, a woman’s lifetime risk of developing cervical cancer if she does not attend cervical screening (smear test) is 1.7%. This means that without screening, about 1 in 60 women will develop cervical cancer. Attending cervical screening can prevent around seven out of ten (70%) cases of cervical cancer by catching and treating abnormalities before they have a chance to develop into cancer
- Factors that increase your exposure to the virus include: being sexually active from a younger age, having children at a younger age, giving birth to many children, and having a higher number of sexual partners. It is important to remember that cervical cancer is not caused by promiscuity or infidelity. The above risk factors simply increase your chances of coming into contact with a high-risk type of HPV at some point.
- Factors that make your body more vulnerable to infections or less able to fight them off (by affecting your body’s immune response) e.g. smoking.

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