



Protecting and improving the nation's health

## NHS Cervical Screening Programme

### **Physician Associate eligibility criteria to undertake cervical sample taker training**

The NHS Cervical Screening Programme (NHS CSP) has received queries from Physician Associates (PAs) taking up posts in GP practices to ask whether they are eligible to undertake cervical sample taker training. The programme acknowledges that this role is becoming a key part of the future multi-disciplinary, multi-skilled, non-doctor workforce in the UK.

Cervical sample taking can currently only be provided by doctors (GMC Registered) or nurses (NMC Registered) registered to practice in the UK, who have undertaken appropriate specialist training in line with NHS CSP guidance.

The eligibility of PAs to undertake cervical sample taker training has been raised and discussed by the Advisory Committee Cervical Screening (ACCS). The committee reviewed the requirements needed to undertake the PA role and the knowledge and core skill set achieved at qualification.

### **The ACCS has recommended that registered Physician Associates would be eligible to undertake cervical sample taker training.**

It is a requirement for sample takers to have professional registration as this is an intimate examination and women need the protection that registration brings. Although PA registration is not mandatory, the NHS CSP would require PAs to be registrants on the Physician Associate Voluntary Register (PAMVR) for the purpose of undertaking cervical sample taking and only registered PAs should be appointed to a post involving cervical screening to ensure that the necessary skill set and competence are known and measurable.

**The NHS CSP acknowledges that the Faculty of Physician Associates is working towards statutory registration for the profession and currently recommends all PAs register on the PAMVR and employers specify registration as a necessary component of employment.**

The current NHS CSP cervical sample taker training guidance is under review. Following the recommendation from the ACCS, the new guidance will incorporate qualified, registered PAs as they will be considered eligible to undertake sample taker training.

The guidance represents best practice for the training of sample takers and provides a common core of theoretical and practical learning to ensure consistency and provide learning to a minimum recognised standard across the NHS CSP. It is designed to be used by experienced training providers.

This should be underpinned by the PAs being able to meet the core clinical competencies laid down in the [Skills for Health cervical cytology sampling competency framework](#) which was additionally developed to ensure the prerequisite clinical competencies for an individual to undertake training were met. It acknowledges that sample taking is not task based but requires a comprehensive consultation. Therefore unregistered staff cannot meet this criterion and cannot undertake cervical screening sample taking.



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