

'Be brave, go for your smear test. It could save your life...'

CHECK REVEALED JOANNA ONE STEP AWAY FROM CERVICAL CANCER



Joanna Gray urges women not to ignore a smear test invitation

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JOANNA Gray can still remember the moment she was told by doctors that they had found abnormal cells in her cervix following a smear test.

"I remember the lady at Trafford hospital saying 'if you'd left this for another three years, then it could have been very, very different,' the 30-year-old told the M.E.N.

Joanna, from Altrincham, had been diagnosed with precancerous cells following a second smear test that detected HPV (human papillomavirus).

Describing herself as 'very organised', Joanna has never missed a smear test and has always been on top of sexual health checks and using protection.

And when it came to her first cervical cancer smear test at the age of 25, she fearlessly 'got it over and done with', but never heard back from her GP.

Eventually, after a phone call or two, the missing results were found, and Joanna was given the all clear.

Fast-forwarding three years, Joanna went for her second smear test, but received a letter shortly afterwards saying that HPV was detected.

Speaking during Cervical Cancer Awareness Week, which runs until tomorrow, she said: "I remember being stood in the kitchen opening the letter with my mum and auntie, crying and thinking 'what's wrong with me?' There's a lot of stigma around HPV and I've always been someone to take my sexual health seriously."

Joanna's mum, who had already given birth to a baby boy, received the same letter some 30 years ago saying they had detected HPV in

her cervix from a smear test, which later turned into precancerous cells that she had removed at the age of 27.

She then went on to have Joanna and her sister.

"My mum was very reassuring," Joanna said.

"She said I had nothing to worry about and if they find something after the next one, I'd have treatment."

Joanna went online in search of answers after reading the jargon-filled letter. Questions were racing through her mind; how could it happen to her? Would she be able to have children?

The letter asked Joanna to revisit her GP for another smear test in 12 months' time.

Human papilloma virus is the name for a very common group of viruses. It can cause genital warts and abnormal cells that can lead to cancer, but can go away without

being treated. The NHS say most people will get some type of HPV in their lifetime, but as it's symptomless, many may not know they have it.

A year later, in September 2018, Joanna was called for a colposcopy where doctors found abnormal cells in large areas on either side of her cervix. Biopsies were taken which proved grade three pre-cancer cells at stage CNI3. She was one step away from cervical cancer.

"From being someone who had gone very regularly, to finding out they were so at the end of the scale in terms of severity - you just panic and you're like, 'what the hell?'"

"I remember the lady at Trafford hospital saying if you'd left this for another three years, then it could have been very, very different.

"Three years is not a long time at all. I would have been 33 and that's still very young. Waiting a year to see if the HPV had cleared itself and

then being told it had reached past stages 1 and 2 for it to be 3; I was blown away."

Joanna was booked in for a removal procedure for January of this year but, on arrival, she was advised that the area would be too large to remove the cells in one go under local anaesthetic and could lead to premature labour if she was to have children in future. It was recommended that Joanna be referred to have laser surgery under general anaesthetic.

Speaking about the day of the procedure, she said: "I remember leaving my mum and going to get my gown on and thinking, 'I am so brave that I have got to this point.'"

During Cervical Cancer Awareness Week, charity Jo's Trust is raising awareness of the side effects of abnormal cell changes and the affects of cell removal procedures.

Around 220,000 women are diagnosed with cell changes every year in the UK, where treatment given to prevent development of cervical cancer is highly successful - 80 per cent of those treated will not experience a recurrence.

Joanna, an account manager based in Deansgate, said her work had been incredible and she had also had huge support from family and friends.

In a final message for the women of Greater Manchester, Joanna said: "As soon as you're invited for a smear test, just go for it and don't be worried even if you're in a scenario like me where you end up absolutely clear, or you might be at a point where you need treatment. But it's just so important to look after your body."

"The NHS are amazing in that they can detect it so early. People need to take advantage of that really. Be brave."

"I remember going to get my gown on and thinking, I am so brave I've got to this point"

Joanna Gray

'Better support is needed'

REBECCA Shoosmith, head of support services, Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust said: "While treatment for cell changes remains highly effective, we must start to see it as more than just a simple procedure and acknowledge the impact diagnosis and treatment can have on women. There has been lots of focus on the needs of those attending screening and of those with a cancer diagnosis, but this is a group who

have previously been overlooked. Better information provision and support for those having treatment is essential."

Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust is the UK's leading cervical cancer charity. It provides information and support to anyone affected by cervical cancer or cell changes and campaigns for excellence in treatment and prevention.

Their helpline is on 0808 802 8000. www.jostrust.org.uk.

Driver set to deny road death accusation

A COACH driver has appeared in court charged with causing the death of an elderly pedestrian in Manchester city centre.

Mark Beardsall, 55, is accused of causing the death of Glyn Ronald Hill by dangerous driving last November.

It follows a collision between a Caetano Levante coach and Mr Hill on Lever Street near Piccadilly Gardens on November 13.

No plea was formally entered and the case was transferred to the crown court.

However Mr Beardsall's lawyer indicated he would be entering a not guilty plea there, saying the issues in the case were "factual and related to the manner of the driving."

Emergency services were scrambled to Lever Street following reports of the collision at around 1.30pm on Tuesday, November 13.

Police said at the time 75-year-old Mr Hill was treated at the scene by paramedics and was taken to hospital with a head injury.

He later died in hospital from his injuries.

A section of Oldham Street and Dale Street was shut for three hours while investigation work took place on the day in question.

Mr Beardsall, of Coed Efa, New Broughton, Wrexham, north Wales, spoke only to confirm his name, address and other details at the short hearing at Manchester magistrates' court on Thursday morning.

His next appearance will be at the crown court next month.

The chair of the bench Sara Moreton told him: "This matter is so serious it can only be dealt with at the crown court."

"So this will be adjourned until July 11.

"You are released on unconditional bail until that date.

"Please keep in touch with your solicitors."



Mark Beardsall