INGO
Irish Network for Gynaecological Oncology

HARRIS
PUBLIC RELATIONS

INGO WORLD GO DAY: PCA

09.10.25

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HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

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OVERVIEW

Harris PR was tasked with delivering a national PR campaign to support World GO Day (Gynaecologic Oncology Awareness Day), with the goal of increasing public understanding and engagement around gynaecological cancers.

The campaign combined press, social, influencer, and event activity to drive maximum impact and generate a cohesive, impactful presence across various media. A strong press office formed the backbone of this communications strategy, tapping into a panel of experts and case studies.

Press Release / Photocall

A national press release was developed and issued to highlight the importance of the campaign, highlighting key research findings to provide a strong media hook. This asset was supported by a strategic photocall featuring a patient advocate and her family, alongside Mary Butler, Minister of State for Mental Health and Older People, to generate strong media and visual interest. The release was also supported with a broad-cast ready audio quote.

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OVERVIEW

Influencer / Social Activity

To raise awareness in a way that was both impactful and shareable, we worked with a small Irish business to create a bespoke crochet uterus, for media and influencer gifting. Crochet - a craft currently trending across social and creative communities - offered an 'of the moment' medium to spark conversation, while the handcrafted element brought warmth and meaning to the campaign. This creative gifting was sent to 15 key media and content creators to assist in creating a buzz across social media and generate media coverage. From a social media perspective, HPR team edited webinar content covering the five gynaecological cancers, produced for social use, complementing a series of awareness-driven posts across platforms, and assisted with social media support, post and caption creation in the days leading up to World GO Day.

On World GO Day

A second photocall on World GO Day with Miriam O'Callaghan further enhanced visibility, while Harris PR also managed Eventbrite setup and RSVP coordination for the Gynaecological Cancer Information Event.

The campaign achieved significant national reach, driving awareness, engagement, and conversation around gynaecological health.

OVERVIEW

Advocacy & Storytelling

Advocacy was a key element of the campaign, focused on educating audiences in the lead up to World GO Day through a combination of medical insights from healthcare professionals and personal testimonies from individuals affected by gynaecological cancers. Harris PR collaborated with INGO to identify and prepare a diverse database of case studies and spokespeople from across the country, ensuring authentic storytelling and broad reach on both a national and regional level.

Case studies were matched with suitable journalists and media outlets to share their journeys and reinforce the campaign's core messages. Harris PR also provided briefing materials, short bios, and interview preparation to support participants, while securing media opportunities for INGO representatives to highlight the importance of these stories.

KEY OBJECTIVES

- To secure widespread media coverage at national and regional levels, using the annual calendar moment to bring awareness to gynaecological cancers and stimulate public conversations.
- Raise awareness and increase public understanding of the five main types of gynaecological cancers (cervical, ovarian, uterine, vaginal, and vulval), including risk factors, symptoms, and the importance of early diagnosis.
- Increase visibility of INGO and position the network as a leader and trusted voice in the field of gynaecological oncology through media engagement and provision of expert commentary.
- Encourage engagement and participation in World GO Day events such as Dip or Dance.
- Leverage media coverage and exposure to help support fundraising goals.

PHOTOCALL IMAGERY

WORLD GO DAY IMAGERY

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COVERAGE SNAPSHOT

Total pieces of Coverage:
47

Overall Potentail Reach
10,517,600

11
Total print pieces with a readership of
1,034,831

16
Total online pieces with a total reach of
8,008,629

5
Total broadcast pieces with a listenership of
394,920

15
Total social pieces with a total reach of
1,079,220

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KPI RECONCILLIATION

Objective	Agreed KPI	Acheived KPI
Print Media Coverage	5–6	**11**
Online Media Coverage	8–9	**16**
Broadcast Media Coverage	2–3	**5**
Interviews	Secure 4-5 interviews with case studies and/or experts for interview opportunities.	**12**
PR Gifting Engagement:	70-75% engagement rate resulting in organic mentions on social media or media coverage.	**57%**

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PRINT COVERAGE

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PRINT COVERAGE

Irish Independent

Reach: 183,102

Irish Independent

My ovarian cancer was discovered by accident – the shock hit me once it was over

When Maggie Noone began experiencing back pain and constipation, she never suspected ovarian cancer. She tells *Arlene Harris* how support from her loved ones helped her to get through treatment

Maggie Noone: 'My cancer was found by accident – and who knows what the story would be if it hadn't?' Photo: Frank McGrath

Everybody experiences back pain at some point or other, so when Maggie Noone felt a twinge in her back and her right side while out walking with a friend on holiday in March 2023, she put it down to her Birkenstock sandals being an unsuitable choice of footwear.

But once back home in Ireland, the pain didn't subside and at times got worse, going from the lower back into the pelvis. Despite being in her mid-50s at the time, she was still menstruating, so when she also began to experience stomach bloating, she thought that the two symptoms were the start of menopause.

Consulting the doctor

These were coupled with extreme tiredness and a lack of appetite, both of which she put down to getting older, but when she started to experience constipation, she began to think something else might be the cause.

"I was looking at all of the symptoms in isolation and when I went to see my doctor, I only mentioned one thing at a time," she says.

"I thought I was going into menopause and embarked on a new exercise routine, but instead of making me feel energised, I was feeling absolutely exhausted all the time.

"In fact, for the first time in my life, I would need a nap after work, which is not like me at all. I was rationalising all the symptoms as something else, but then I started to get constipated, and began to think something must be up.

"I didn't really do much about it until I went to this doctor again to say that I was sick of the monthly bleeding and that I was too old to still be having periods – so I asked to be referred for a hysterectomy."

While waiting for a referral, the mother of three daughters did some research online and decided that she might have fibroids, so when she saw the surgeon, she mentioned the other symptoms she had been having.

This must have raised alarm bells, as during surgery, he did a further examination and afterwards told her that "he didn't like the way it felt".

"He went in looking for fibroids and then told me that more tests needed to be done – and a week later, I was told that I had ovarian cancer," she says.

"This was discovered entirely by accident and it was so out of the blue, as I've never smoked and there is no history of cancer in my family. I count myself as an intelligent woman and always went for my routine breast checks, but thought, perhaps naively, that I had a sort of golden shield of protection around myself because of those factors, and that I would never get cancer. Yet there I was, being told that I had a stage 3b ovarian cancer which would need immediate treatment.

> *"During treatment, it's like your life force drains away and everything is so hard. But when it was over, it was like my body went into rebound"*

"I was completely numb and didn't really have time to take in the news, as everything happened so quickly. The following week I went in for surgery (to remove the ovaries) and then after that I started a six-week course of chemotherapy.

"It was only when I got an infection during treatment that it first began to hit home and I fully realised what was happening and began to think that I might not survive. I started to spiral downwards for a while, but I'm very much a glass half full' person, so I made myself think positively about recovery and the future, and that is what got me through."

Along with the hysterectomy, the now 56-year-old also had her ovaries removed, as well as part of her cervix and bowel, and also several lymph nodes. By April 2024 she had completed both surgery and chemotherapy and, after having a colostomy bag fitted to allow her bowel to recover, began a course of immunotherapy.

Despite moving house in the middle of treatment, says she was "amazed" at how quickly her body went into recovery mode as soon as her ordeal was over. And today she is doing very well, even though she has "tired days" every so often, during which she allows herself to rest and then start again. This, along with "amazing support", is what has helped her to recover.

"During treatment, it's like your life force drains away and everything is so hard," she says. "But when it was over, it was like my body went into rebound – within about three weeks, I could see my hair starting to return and I began to recover some of my energy.

"My husband, Simon, my daughters and the rest of our family and friends were fantastic – I am lucky to have such an amazing family around me, with six young grandchildren who kept me going. I've had nothing but goodness and kindness and have been surrounded by love.

"But the ordeal really does hit you once it's all over, so I did go to see a therapist. I remember her saying to me that she could see that I wanted her to assure me that I would live until I was 86, but she said the only time I will know that I won't die of cancer is when I die of something else, so I had to start living – and that is what I did.

"I went back to work (in adult education) in November 2024 and that really helped me to start feeling normal again – putting on makeup, wearing something nice and mixing with people. I stopped worrying about being immunocompromised and just got on with my life."

On September 20, the Irish Network for Gynaecological Oncology (INGO) is marking *World GO Day* (Gynaecological Oncology Awareness Day), a global initiative dedicated to raising awareness about gynaecologic cancers, promoting early detection, and supporting those affected.

Early detection

Maggie knows only too well the importance of being aware of the signs of ovarian cancer and urges other women to become familiar with the symptoms, as early detection could save lives.

"Looking back, I can't believe that it wasn't picked up earlier as I had all the classic symptoms of BEAT (Bloating, Eating difficulty/feeling full, Abdominal pain and Toilet changes)," says the Kildare woman.

"But these can all be attributed to something else, and if you don't look at them together you can easily decide that it is something else entirely.

"As women, we will put these things down to menopause, perimenopause or middle-aged spread, so I would advise anyone who is experiencing these symptoms to get them checked out. Stop letting your rational brain tell you that it's all fine and listen to your body – this is really important.

"And if you do get diagnosed, take all the support offered, whether it is from healthcare professionals, the Irish Cancer Society or friends – don't try and do everything yourself, as I did when I was first diagnosed. I will have one more surgery next year to reverse my stoma and then I will hopefully be completely back to myself.

"But who knows, if I had been diagnosed sooner, I might not have had the same ordeal. I would love to see a big sign in every doctor's surgery telling women about the signs of ovarian cancer, because they can be easily mistaken for something else and left until it's too late.

"My cancer was found by accident – and who knows what the story would be if it hadn't? So I really want everyone to know the signs and get help sooner rather than later, as it could make all the difference."

Continued overleaf

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HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

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PRINT COVERAGE

Irish Mail on Sunday:

Reach: 146,300

The IRISH Mail ON SUNDAY

'I'd never heard of it'

A WOMAN with ovarian cancer said she had 'never even heard of the disease' before her diagnosis two years ago.

It comes as the Irish Network for Gynaecological Oncology is this week highlighting that cervical screening does not test for all gynaecological cancers, and is advising women to be vigilant about new symptoms.

Karen Casey from Clonsilla, Dublin, was eventually diagnosed with ovarian cancer at the age of 48 after visiting her GP about unexplained weight gain.

Ms Casey told the Irish Mail on Sunday she had been getting an MRI and breast check twice a year, since breast cancer runs in her family.

'But ovarian cancer and breast cancer are related [in terms of genetic risk factors] – why was I never told?' she asked.

'And I'm not blaming anyone, but stuff like that [could be better flagged]. None of my friends even knew about it. They always would have thought a smear test would pick that up, which it doesn't.'

Her surgeon had told her she 'wouldn't have made it past Christmas 2023' had she not gone to the GP about her bloated belly.

She had been 'living my best life' up to then – 'extremely healthy', a non-smoker and a social drinker.

She first put the weight gain down to an indulgent holiday in the US, but 'just couldn't lose it' despite trying 'everything'.

'My mam used to joke "Are you sure you're not pregnant?" A lot of my friends were saying they had the menopause belly, so I thought that must be it because I was coming up to 50. But I was like, "I'll be bloody huge at the end of the menopause if this keeps going."'

At a wedding she realised she 'looked pregnant' in the dress and resolved to visit her GP the following Monday.

That led to tests and a diagnosis, then surgery and chemotherapy.

The treatment worked for a while but six months later Ms Casey was 'back where I started' and is now receiving chemo again.

'It's no walk in the park, but it's working, and that's all I care about,' she said.

'I'm still here to fight another day.'

The mother of two said she is now 'stopping and smelling the roses' and said 'none of the big things mean the same' now.

'It's changed me so much and, believe me, it's the little things in life that keep us all going.

'It's not the big things, like going on fancy holidays. It's sitting in on a Saturday night, having a crappy takeaway watching something good on television. With a bottle of prosecco of course.'

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PRINT COVERAGE

Irish Mail on Sunday

Reach: 146,300

The IRISH Mail ON SUNDAY

Leading gynaecologist hails DIY cervical tests

Device described as a 'great opportunity' set to come on stream here

By Colm McGuirk

HOME cervical screening tests being trialled in the UK are expected to also come on stream in Ireland, a leading gynaecologist has told the Irish Mail on Sunday.

'Do it yourself' smear tests are currently being trialled by the NHS in England where they have had a positive reception from clients and clinicians, according to the British Medical Journal.

In Ireland, testing for human papillomavirus (HPV), which causes most cervical cancers, is still done only as part of the HSE's cervical screening programme in a clinical setting.

But home tests would represent a 'great opportunity' for women who do not attend primary care, according to Ruaidhrí McVey, a consultant gynaecologist and gynaecological oncologist at the Mater Private Hospital in Dublin.

He explained: 'As opposed to having to have a speculum exam, women can take a self-smear themselves, take a swab and send it off to the laboratory in a postage-paid envelope and get the result back.'

The cancer specialist said the number of women who would prefer tests at home to a primary care setting is 'probably a relatively small proportion', but added the tests would be 'a great opportunity, particularly for women who, for all sorts of reasons, don't attend primary care'.

He said: 'It's not routinely available in Ireland yet, but it will come on stream.'

tings, do not screen for all types of gynaecological cancers.

The Irish Network for Gynaecological Oncology (INGO) says this is a common 'misconception', with almost one in three women (31%) believing the opposite, according to its research.

In fact, the tests do not screen for vulval, vaginal, uterine (endometrial/womb) or ovarian cancer.

Mr McVey continued that vulvar and vaginal cancer 'are considered pretty rare by comparison to endometrial and cervical cancers'.

'We have about 350 to 400 of [the latter] cancers per year, and then a slightly lesser number of ovarian cancers.'

He said there was strong awareness of cervical cancer and a successful HPV vaccination programme, but 'less so' for endometrial cancer, which usually occurs in post-menopausal women 'typically over the age of 50'.

'Menopause occurs when someone has not had a period for about a year, and so any bleeding after the age of menopause is considered abnormal,' Mr McVey said.

'The message for women is that any symptom that is new, persistent and different from before, or progressive compared to before, warrants investigation. So even if someone's had a cervical screen and they have abnormal bleeding, they should still seek advice.'

The Irish Society of Gynaecological Oncology member continued:

their cervical screening up to date, that that covers them from a gynaecological standpoint – it doesn't. The only thing a cervical screen detects is [cell changes cause by] HPV, in the hope that we can prevent a cervical cancer later on down the line. It doesn't have any bearing for endometrial cancer or for ovarian cancer.'

The same INGO research found that one in seven women delay or avoid GP visits due to embarrassment at discussing symptoms, and one in five would avoid going to the doctor because they do not want to speak to the GP's receptionist about their symptoms.

The INGO says these barriers 'can have life-threatening consequences', with almost 2,000 women across the island of Ireland diagnosed with gynaecological cancers annually.

Mr McVey stressed that primary care centres are 'excellently set up', adding: 'The vast majority of general practitioners have a female GP with a specialism in women's health. Many of them will have nurses as well. And yet, there's a little bit of reluctance about going to be examined, particularly with intimate examination.

'They don't have to have an intimate examination, but it does warrant having a conversation with somebody, and maybe they can have an ultrasound if they were hesitant about being examined internally.'

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HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

PRINT COVERAGE

Irish Daily Mirror

Reach: 133,340

IRISH Mirror

I was told I'd got trapped wind... but it was ovarian cancer

Mum urges GPs to listen to patients after disease warnings were missed

BY CIARA O'LOUGHLIN

A MUM is highlighting how doctors need to be more aware of the symptoms of ovarian cancer after she was told her tumour was "trapped wind".

Linda Callinan, 53, from Carlow, is

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PRINT COVERAGE

Irish Sun

Reach: 96,990

GYNAECOLOGICAL CANCER ALERT

NEARLY 2,000 women in Ireland are diagnosed with a gynaecological cancer each year.

However, awareness of symptoms and risk factors remains alarmingly low. And this lack of understanding not only delays diagnosis but, in many cases, costs lives.

Here, SHARON O'TOOLE, *right*, from the Trinity St James's Cancer Institute and Co-ordinator of the Irish Network of Gynaecological Oncology (INGO), highlights the urgent need to empower women to recognise the signs early and prioritise their health.

'We all have a role to play in improving awareness'

WORLD Gynaecological Oncology Day is a global initiative dedicated to raising awareness of gynaecological cancers.

Held on September 20 every year, this was the seventh World GO Day.

In Ireland, the Irish Network of Gynaecological Oncology co-ordinated a World GO Day awareness campaign.

INGO is a voluntary network of over 30 of Ireland's top gynaecological cancer campaigners, researchers and patient advocates who believe in working together to improve women's lives.

INGO aims to raise awareness of gynaecological cancers across the island of Ireland, highlighting symptoms, risks and prevention.

There are five main types of gynaecological cancer: vulval, vaginal, cervical, uterine and ovarian.

Almost 2,000 cases are diagnosed annually across the whole of Ireland, representing almost 12 per cent of female cancers. Misconceptions and stigma around gynaecological cancers continue to be a barrier to early diagnosis.

Research commissioned by INGO and funded by Breakthrough Cancer Research, shows one in three women (31 per cent) mistakenly believe cervical screening checks for all five gynaecological cancers.

The same research found that one in seven woman delay or avoid GP visits due to embarrassment around symptoms, and one in five would avoid going to the doctor because they do not want to speak to the GP receptionist about their symptoms.

But it is important for women not to ignore symptoms, as early detection saves lives.

Distinct symptoms and risk factors are associated with each of the five cancers.

VULVAL CANCER: Persistent itching, skin changes or lesions should be checked as soon as possible, as early diagnosis can reduce the need for aggressive treatment.

VAGINAL CANCER: Although this cancer is rare, HPV vaccination plays a key role in prevention. Examination of the vaginal area can help detect pre-cancerous lesions.

Only one in four women in Ireland link changes in urinary habits to this cancer.

CERVICAL CANCER: The majority of cervical cancers are caused by the human papillomavirus.

The good news is that it can largely be prevented by HPV vaccination in early puberty and attending HPV cervical screening each time you are invited.

If you are found to have the virus, your sample is checked for abnormal cells.

If you have abnormal cells, you are referred to colposcopy for further investigation and treatment to stop cancer from developing.

Ireland is on track to eliminate cervical cancer by 2040.

Even with vaccination and screening, women should still be aware of symptoms, such as abnormal vaginal bleeding or discharge, or pain during sex. Consult a GP if worried.

UTERINE (ENDOMETRIAL/WOMB) CANCER: The most common gynaecological cancer may be signalled by post-menopausal bleeding or bleeding between periods in younger women. Yet only 40 per cent of women in Ireland recognise abnormal bleeding and discharge as a symptom.

OVARIAN CANCER: Over 75 per cent of cases are diagnosed in advanced stages.

There is no reliable screening test, so awareness of persistent symptoms is critical to avoid delays in diagnosis and treatment. People should know their family history and communicate this to their GP because, for example, the BRCA1/2 gene alterations and Lynch syndrome can increase your risk.

The BEAT acronym helps us to remember the symptoms: Bloating, Eating difficulties, Abdominal pain and Toilet changes.

The INGO research highlighted that four out of five (79 per cent) women are not confident they would notice a symptom of ovarian cancer.

The lack of awareness of gynaecological cancer symptoms is concerning and we all have a role in improving this.

A concerted national effort is needed. Sharing information on symptoms, risks and prevention can lead to earlier diagnosis and better outcomes.

If something is not normal for you and symptoms persist for more than two weeks, talk to your GP.

●FOR more information and resources visit www.thisisgo.ie.

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HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

PRINT COVERAGE

Irish Daily Star

Reach: 87,993

Irish Daily STAR

'IF MY STORY SAVES ONE life, I will be happy'

An Irish woman has told of the "shocking" moment she was told she had cancer – after suffering pain from what she thought was a pulled muscle.

Grainne Morgan-O'Rourke, from Carrickmacross in Monaghan, attended her GP in August 2022 for a smear test and while there mentioned in passing that she thought she pulled a muscle in her abdomen.

"In fact, I pulled what I thought was a muscle in my stomach because I twisted really, really fast so it was just like a muscle pain right in the middle of my stomach and it kind of lingered for two weeks," Grainne told Ok!.

"I was going to my GP anyway for my smear test at the start of August so I mentioned to her, 'you know, I pulled a muscle and it's annoying me'.

"She sent me for an ultrasound at my local hospital but I was just thinking, 'oh sure, it's just an ultrasound'.

"I had the ultrasound at my local hospital and then I was referred on the two-week wait for gynae."

The ultrasound revealed a large ovarian cyst, prompting more scans and tests, with mother-of-two Grainne also referred to a consultant.

"During that time I was Googling away but I was thinking, 'it's only a large ovarian cyst, sure I'll be grand'.

"When I was referred to a consultant, he said, 'look, we don't know what we're dealing with at the moment. There's two options, I can go in and take out one ovary and one tube or do the full hysterectomy'.

"And I just said, 'look it, I've two kids. I'm 44, I'm not having any more, take it because I don't want to go back for more surgery'."

Following this surgery, Grainne knew she would be put into surgical menopause, but she said the worry about the side effects of that wasn't enough to deter her from having the surgery.

"I'm very, 'ah sure what will be will be so I just thought, 'just take it' because I didn't want to go in for more surgery so I said I'd just deal with menopause when it comes.

"My recovery from that surgery, I was very lucky. My nurses advised me I had to do a little bit of exercise every day and eat a balanced diet and I'm very lucky because my mum did come up to me every day for two weeks and cook

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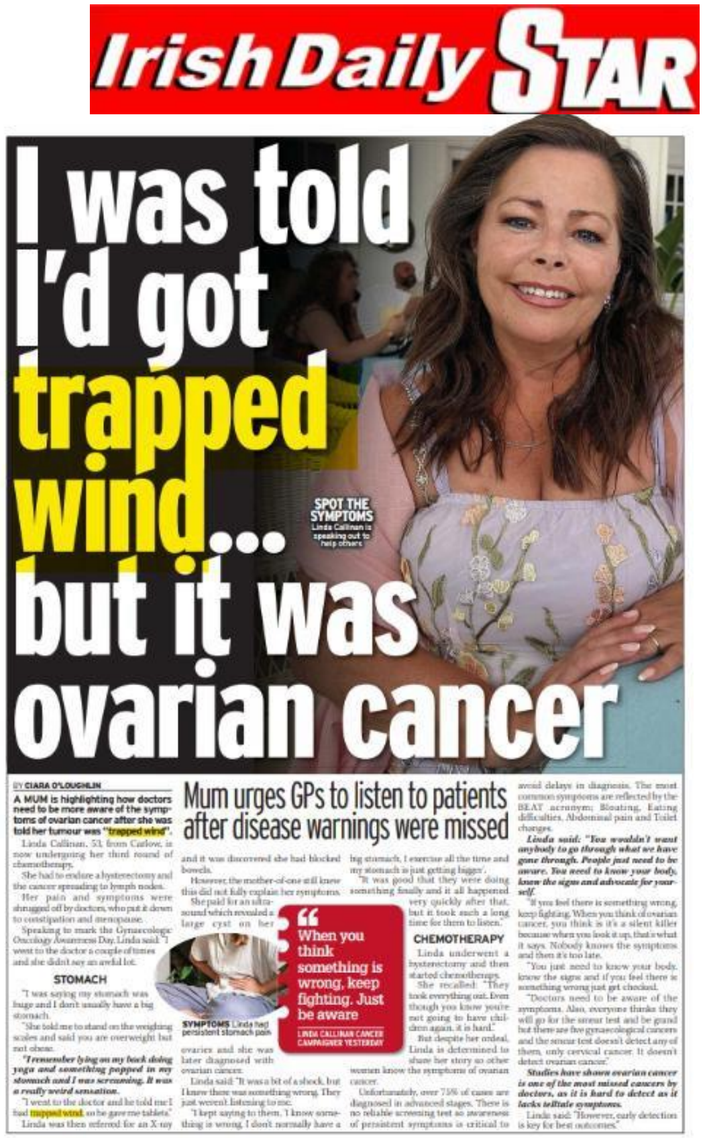
HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

PRINT COVERAGE

Irish Daily Star (Star Chic Mag)

Reach: 87,993



Irish Daily STAR

I was told I'd got trapped wind... but it was ovarian cancer

SPOT THE SYMPTOMS Linda Callinan is speaking out to help others

BY CIARA O'LOUGHLIN

A MUM is highlighting how doctors need to be more aware of the symptoms of ovarian cancer after she was told her tumour was "trapped wind".

Linda Callinan, 53, from Carlow, is now undergoing her third round of chemotherapy.

She had to endure a hysterectomy and the cancer spreading to lymph nodes.

Her pain and symptoms were shrugged off by doctors, who put it down to constipation and menopause.

Speaking to mark the Gynaecologic Oncology Awareness Day, Linda said: "I went to the doctor a couple of times and she didn't say an awful lot.

STOMACH

"I was saying my stomach was huge and I don't usually have a big stomach.

"She told me to stand on the weighing scales and said you are overweight but not obese.

"I remember lying on my back doing yoga and something popped in my stomach and I was screaming. It was a really weird sensation.

"I went to the doctor and he told me I had trapped wind, so he gave me tablets."

Linda was then referred for an X-ray and it was discovered she had blocked bowels.

However, the mother-of-one still knew this did not fully explain her symptoms.

She paid for an ultrasound which revealed a large cyst on her ovaries and she was later diagnosed with ovarian cancer.

SYMPTOMS Linda had persistent stomach pain

Linda said: "It was a bit of a shock, but I knew there was something wrong. They just weren't listening to me.

"I kept saying to them, 'I know something is wrong, I don't normally have a big stomach, I exercise all the time and my stomach is just getting bigger'.

"It was good that they were doing something finally and it all happened very quickly after that, but it took such a long time for them to listen."

> "When you think something is wrong, keep fighting. Just be aware
> LINDA CALLINAN CANCER CAMPAIGNER YESTERDAY

CHEMOTHERAPY

Linda underwent a hysterectomy and then started chemotherapy.

She recalled: "They took everything out. Even though you know you're not going to have children again, it is hard."

But despite her ordeal, Linda is determined to share her story so other women know the symptoms of ovarian cancer.

Unfortunately, over 75% of cases are diagnosed in advanced stages. There is no reliable screening test so awareness of persistent symptoms is critical to avoid delays in diagnosis. The most common symptoms are reflected by the SEAT acronym: Bloating, Eating difficulties, Abdominal pain and Toilet changes.

Linda said: "You wouldn't want anybody to go through what we have gone through. People just need to be aware. You need to know your body, know the signs and advocate for yourself.

"If you feel there is something wrong, keep fighting. When you think of ovarian cancer, you think it's a silent killer because when you look it up, that is what it says. Nobody knows the symptoms and then it's too late.

"You just need to know your body, know the signs and if you feel there is something wrong just get checked.

"Doctors need to be aware of the symptoms. Also, everyone thinks they will go for the smear test and be grand but there are five gynaecological cancers and the smear test doesn't detect any of them, only cervical cancer. It doesn't detect ovarian cancer."

Studies have shown ovarian cancer is one of the most missed cancers by doctors, as it is hard to detect as it lacks telltale symptoms.

Linda said: "However, early detection is key for best outcomes."

Mum urges GPs to listen to patients after disease warnings were missed

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HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

PRINT COVERAGE

Irish Examiner

Reach: 83,100

Irish Examiner

Delaying surgery to have a baby was not an option

Gráinne Culliton had to undergo a hysterectomy for cervical cancer but later became a mum of two through surrogacy, says **Arlene Harris**

Gráinne Culliton from Tramore, Co Waterford, at home with her dog Jordan.
Picture: Patrick Browne

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PRINT COVERAGE

The Herald

Reach: 63,555

THE Herald

My ovarian cancer was discovered by accident – the shock hit me once it was over

When Maggie Noone began experiencing back pain and constipation, she never suspected ovarian cancer. She tells *Arlene Harris* how support from her loved ones helped her to get through treatment

Maggie Noone: 'My cancer was found by accident – and who knows what the story would be if it hadn't?' Photo Frank McGrath

Everybody experiences back pain at some point or other, so when Maggie Noone felt a twinge in her back and her right side while out walking with a friend on holiday in March 2023, she put it down to her Birkenstock sandals being an unsuitable choice of footwear.

But once back home in Ireland, the pain didn't subside and at times got worse, going from the lower back into the pelvis. Despite being in her mid-50s at the time, she was still menstruating, so when she also began to experience stomach bloating, she thought that the two symptoms were the start of menopause.

Consulting the doctor

These were coupled with extreme tiredness and a lack of appetite, both of which she put down to getting older, but when she started to experience constipation, she began to think something else might be the cause.

"I was looking at all of the symptoms in isolation and when I went to see my doctor, I only mentioned one thing at a time," she says.

"I thought I was going into menopause and embarked on a new exercise routine, but instead of making me feel energised, I was feeling absolutely exhausted all the time.

"In fact, for the first time in my life, I would need a nap after work, which is not like me at all. I was rationalising all the symptoms as something else, but then I started to get constipated, and began to think something must be up.

"I didn't really do much about it until I went to the doctor again to say that I was sick of the monthly bleeding and that I was too old to still be having periods – so I asked to be referred for a hysterectomy."

While waiting for a referral, the mother of three daughters did some research online and decided that she might have fibroids, so when she saw the surgeon, she mentioned the other symptoms she had been having.

This must have raised alarm bells, as during surgery, he did a further examination and afterwards told her that "he didn't like the way it felt".

"He went in looking for fibroids and then told me that more tests needed to be done – and a week later, I was told that I had ovarian cancer," she says.

"This was discovered entirely by accident and it was so out of the blue, as I've never smoked and there is no history of cancer in my family. I count myself as an intelligent woman and always went for my routine breast checks, but thought, perhaps naively, that I had a sort of golden shield of protection around myself because of those factors, and that I would never get cancer. Yet there I was, being told that I had a stage 3b ovarian cancer which would need immediate treatment.

> *"During treatment, it's like your life force drains away and everything is so hard. But when it was over, it was like my body went into rebound"*

"I was completely numb and didn't really have time to take in the news, as everything happened so quickly. The following week I went in for surgery (to remove the ovaries) and then after that I started a six-week course of chemotherapy.

"It was only when I got an injection during treatment that it first began to hit home and I fully realised what was happening and began to think that I might not survive. I started to spiral downwards for a while, but I'm very much a glass half full person, so I made myself think positively about recovery and the future, and that is what got me through."

Along with the hysterectomy, the now 56-year-old also had her ovaries removed, as well as part of her cervix and bowel, and also several lymph nodes. By April 2024, she had completed both surgery and chemotherapy and, after having a colostomy bag fitted to allow her bowel to recover, began a course of immunotherapy.

Despite moving house in the middle of treatment, says she was "amazed" at how quickly her body went into recovery mode as soon as her ordeal was over. And today she is doing very well, even though she has "tired days" every so often, during which she allows herself to rest and then start again. This, along with "amazing support", is what has helped her to recover.

"During treatment, it's like your life force drains away and everything is so hard," she says. "But when it was over, it was like my body went into rebound – within about three weeks, I could see my hair starting to return and I began to recover some of my energy.

"My husband, Simon, my daughters and the rest of our family and friends were fantastic – I am lucky to have such an amazing family around me, with six young grandchildren who keep me going. I've had nothing but goodness and kindness and have been surrounded by love.

"But the ordeal really does hit you once it's all over, so I did go to see a therapist. I remember her saying to me that she could see that I wanted her to assure me that I would live until I was 86, but she said the only time I will know that I won't die of cancer is when I die of something else, so I had to start living – and that is what I did.

"I went back to work (in adult education) in November 2024 and that really helped me to start looking normal again – putting on makeup, wearing something nice and mixing with people. I stopped worrying about being immunocompromised and just got on with my life."

On September 20, the Irish Network for Gynaecological Oncology (INGO) is marking World GO Day (Gynaecological Oncology Awareness Day), a global initiative dedicated to raising awareness about gynaecologic cancers, promoting early detection, and supporting those affected.

Early detection

Maggie knows only too well the importance of being aware of the signs of ovarian cancer and urges other women to become familiar with the symptoms, as early detection could save lives.

"Looking back, I can't believe (that it wasn't) picked up earlier as I had all the classic symptoms of BEAT (Bloating, Eating difficulty/feeling full, Abdominal pain and Toilet changes)," says the Kildare woman.

"But these can all be attributed to something else, and if you don't look at them together you can easily decide that it is something else entirely.

"As women, we will put these things down to menopause, perimenopause or middle-aged spread, so I would advise anyone who is experiencing these symptoms to get them checked out. Stop letting your rational brain tell you that it's all fine and listen to your body – this is really important.

"And if you do get diagnosed, take all the support offered, whether it is from healthcare professionals, the Irish Cancer Society or friends – don't try and do everything yourself, as I did when I was first diagnosed. I will have one more surgery next year to reverse my stoma and then I will hopefully be completely back to myself.

"But who knows. If I had been diagnosed sooner, I might not have had the same ordeal. I would love to see a big sign in every doctor's surgery telling women about the signs of ovarian cancer, because they can be easily mistaken for something else and left until it's too late.

"My cancer was found by accident – and who knows what the story would be if it hadn't? So I really want everyone to know the signs and get help sooner rather than later, as it could make all the difference."

Continued overleaf

INGO
Irish Network for Gynaecological Oncology

HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

PRINT COVERAGE

Irish Daily Mail

Reach: 48,015

Irish Daily Mail

More awareness of gynae cancers needed

World Gynaecological Oncology Day (World GO Day) takes place on Saturday, 20th September. The aim of this initiative is to raise awareness of all five types of gynaecological cancers (vulval, vaginal, cervical, uterine, and ovarian) - which are responsible for nearly 2,000 diagnoses in Ireland annually.

Misconceptions and stigma around gynaecological cancers continue to be a major barrier to early diagnosis. Research commissioned by the Irish Network for Gynaecological Oncology (INGO), and funded by Breakthrough Cancer Research, shows that one in three women (31%) mistakenly believe cervical screening checks for all five gynaecological cancers.

The same research found that one in seven women delay or avoid GP visits due to embarrassment discussing symptoms, and one in five would avoid going to the doctor because they do not want to speak to the GP receptionist about their symptoms. Different gynaecological cancers can cause different symptoms. According to INGO, if any of the following persist for more than two weeks, it is important to speak to a GP:

- Abnormal vaginal bleeding, including bleeding after the menopause
- Pelvic pain
- Vaginal bleeding during or after sex
- Persistent abdominal swelling or bloating
- Unexplained weight loss or gain
- Ongoing bowel or bladder changes, such as diarrhoea, constipation or having to pass urine more frequently.

This September, the INGO is encouraging the public to register for a free information event at 3pm on World GO Day at 'Cancer Revolution Exhibition' in Stephen's Green Shopping Centre, Dublin 2. Registration is available at http://bit.ly/47DIvhg.

For more information on activities and events, see thisisgo.ie.

INGO
Irish Network for Gynaecological Oncology

HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

PRINT COVERAGE

Clare Champion

Reach: 47,226

Spanish Point dip for a healthy life

Sharon Delan D'Arcy

IT IS HOPED a Dip4GoDay event planned by the Spanish Point community this coming weekend will bring people together and encourage West Clare women to prioritise their health.

The event which takes place on Spanish Point beach on Sunday, September 21 is in conjunction with June Curtis and her Sulmhat Sásta group of daily sea swimmers.

The dip will mark World Gynaecological Oncology Day or World GO Day taking place on Saturday, September 20 where the Irish Network for Gynaecological Oncology (INGO) and its supporters around the world unite to raise awareness of all five types of gynaecological cancers (vulval, vaginal, cervical, uterine, and ovarian), promote early detection, and support affected women globally through open conversations.

As part of the annual campaign, INGO has invited people across Clare to join 'Dip or Dance' or #Dip4GODay events across the country, like the Spanish Point one.

These events, ranging from sea swims to community dances, aim to highlight how staying active can help reduce the risk of certain cancers, including uterine cancer.

In addition, specific landmarks across the globe will be lit up in purple, the colour associated with the fight against gynaecological cancer, internationally.

Gynaecological cancers affect the female reproductive system and different gynaecological cancers can cause different symptoms.

However, research commissioned by INGO, and funded by Breakthrough Cancer Research, reveals that one in three women (38%) mistakenly believe cervical screening checks for all five gynaecological cancers.

INGO is a voluntary coordination body of over 30 of Ireland's leading gynaecological cancer

With almost 2,000 women across the island of Ireland diagnosed with gynaecological cancers annually, misconceptions and stigma around gynaecological cancers continue to be major barriers to early diagnosis and these barriers can have potentially life-threatening consequences.

Suzanne Bermingham, Patient Advocate and Nurse, shared her experience:

"Having lived with endometriosis and adenomyosis, I was used to heavy bleeding, but when my symptoms became severe enough to require a blood transfusion, I knew something was different.

"Participating in the World GO Day swim and seeing the gynaecological cancer symptom checklist made me realise I couldn't ignore it.

"My message to women is simple: don't ignore your symptoms, advocate for yourself, and speak openly about all aspects of women's health.

"I swim twice a week with my family across four generations (my daughter, mother, and grandchild) which gives us time to connect and talk openly.

"Family support is invaluable and understanding what's normal versus a warning sign empowers us to seek help, because speaking up can save lives."

Dr Dearbhaile Collins, President Irish Society of Gynaecological Oncology said on World GO Day they want to remind women that early detection is crucial for improving survival rates in gynaecological cancers.

"Knowing the symptoms and risk factors is key, and if you notice anything unusual, don't be embarrassed to speak to your GP," she said.

"Family history is also important to convey to your GP as genetics can play a role in some gynaecological cancers.

"Stigma and misconceptions still prevent many women from seeking help, so it's vital to normalise conversations about gynaecological health.

INGO
Irish Network for Gynaecological Oncology

HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

PRINT COVERAGE

Irish Medical Times:

Reach 7,697

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HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

ONLINE COVERAGE

INGO
Irish Network for Gynaecological Oncology

HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

ONLINE COVERAGE

The Irish Times

Reach: 1,457,153.75

Sections ☰ THE IRISH TIMES 14°

Health

Gynaecological cancers: 'What strikes me is how easy it would have been to dismiss that one symptom'

Many women delay or avoid GP visits due to embarrassment about discussing symptoms such as changes in vaginal discharge

INGO
Irish Network for Gynaecological Oncology

HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

ONLINE COVERAGE

Irish Independent

Reach: 1,170,743

Irish Independent News Opinion Business Sport Life Style En

Home / Life / Health & Wellbeing / Health Features

I thought my back pain and tiredness was menopause – it was ovarian cancer

When Maggie Noone began experiencing exhaustion, pain and constipation, she never suspected ovarian cancer. She shares how support from her loved ones helped her to get through treatment and the signs and symptoms she wants everyone to know

INGO
Irish Network for Gynaecological Oncology

HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

ONLINE COVERAGE

Irish Independent

Reach: 1,170,743

Home / Life / Health & Wellbeing

Maggie Noone speaks about her ovarian cancer diagnosis and treatment

Maggie Noone speaks about her ovarian cancer diagnosis and treatment

Frank McGrath
Sun 31 Aug 2025 at 06:00

Everybody experiences back pain at some point or other, so when Maggie Noone felt a twinge in her back and her right side while out walking with a friend on holiday in March 2023, she put it down to her Birkenstock sandals being an unsuitable choice of footwear.

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Irish Network for Gynaecological Oncology

HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

ONLINE COVERAGE

Irish Independent

Reach: 1,170,743

Irish Independent News Opinion Business Sport Life Style Enter

As a subscriber you are reading this PREMIUM artic

Brave Donegal woman living with stage four ovarian cancer was told initially it was acid reflux

Fiona Feeney from Ballyshannon, Co Donegal.

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HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

ONLINE COVERAGE

Irish Independent

Reach: 1,170,743

Irish Independent News Opinion Business Sport Life Style Enter

Wexford sea swim set to raise awareness for gynaecological cancers

One in three women mistakenly believe Cervical Screening checks for all gynaecological cancers

A sea swim will take place in Wexford to raise awareness for Gynaecological cancers.

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HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

ONLINE COVERAGE

The Irish Examiner

Reach: 517,767

HOMEPAGE / LIFESTYLE / HEALTH & WELLBEING

'At 38, I was told that I needed to have a hysterectomy because they had found cancer'

Gráinne Culliton was devastated when she was told she had to undergo a hysterectomy for cervical cancer at 38. However, she went on to become a mum of two through surrogacy

Pictured is Grainne Culliton from Tramore, Co. Waterford. Also pictured is her dog Jordan. Photograph: Patrick Browne

INGO
Irish Network for Gynaecological Oncology

HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

ONLINE COVERAGE

Irish Sun

Reach: 480,192

EXCLUSIVE

Sun Club Health > News Health

BE HEARD I'd abnormal bleeding & knew something was wrong but no one would listen before shock diagnosis

There are a number of key signs to watch out for

Isabela Boechat, News Reporter

Published: 14:57, 20 Sep 2025 | **Updated:** 14:53, 21 Sep 2025

DUBLIN mum Suzanne Bermingham knew her body was telling her something was wrong – but she struggle to get medics to listen before her shock diagnosis.

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HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

ONLINE COVERAGE

MSN

Reach: 437,525

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Irish Network for Gynaecological Oncology

HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

ONLINE COVERAGE

RSVP

Reach: 117,004

Life › Real Life

Dublin mum diagnosed with stage 4 ovarian cancer after having ‘very bloated tummy’

Deirdre Flannelly was dealing with different health issues and thought they were unrelated, but after her diagnosis, she realised they were signs of ovarian cancer

LIFE By Shauna Bannon Ward
20:35, 22 SEP 2025 | UPDATED 21:48, 22 SEP 2025

Bookmark Comments

Deirdre Flannelly

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Irish Network for Gynaecological Oncology

HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

ONLINE COVERAGE

RSVP

Reach: 117,004

Life › Cancer

Irish woman was diagnosed with cancer after thinking it was a pulled muscle

Grainne Morgan-O'Rourke's ultrasound revealed a large ovarian cyst, prompting more scans and tests, with the Carrickmacross native also referred to a consultant

LIFE By Rachel Beresford
17:24, 20 SEP 2025

Bookmark Comments

Grainne Morgan-O'Rourke, from Carrickmacross in Monaghan

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Irish Network for Gynaecological Oncology

HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

ONLINE COVERAGE

Extra.ie

Reach: 85,665

Leading gynaecologist hails DIY cervical tests set to be introduced in Ireland

Colm McGuirk
21/09/2025

Home cervical screening tests being trialled in the UK are expected to also come on stream in Ireland, a leading gynaecologist has told Extra.ie.

'Do it yourself' smear tests are currently being trialled by the NHS in England where they have had a positive reception from clients and clinicians, according to the British Medical Journal.

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HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

ONLINE COVERAGE

EVOKE

Reach: 82,136

EVOKE

search articles

ENTERTAINMENT FASHION BEAUTY LIFESTYLE HOME & STYLE WELLNESS NEWS WEDDINGS INSPIRE SHOP

Leading Irish gynaecologist praises DIY cervical smear tests that women can use at home

Harvey Norman
PhotoCent
MAKE FIRST DA
LAST FOREVE
PHOTO
FROM

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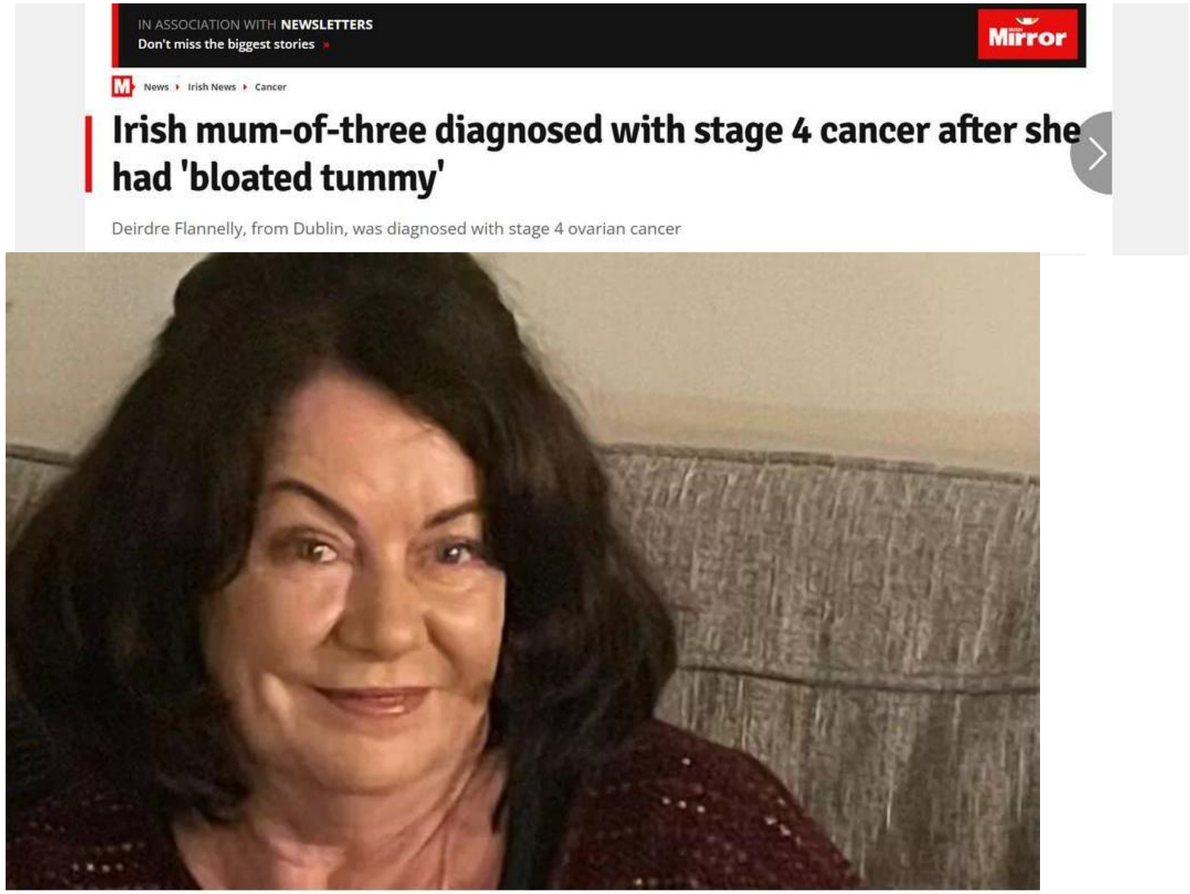
Irish Network for Gynaecological Oncology

HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

ONLINE COVERAGE



Irish Mirror

Reach: 19,600

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Irish Network for Gynaecological Oncology

HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

ONLINE COVERAGE

Waterford News & Star

Reach: 2,304

Waterford News & Star

NEWS SPORT YOUR COMMUNITY LIFE WHAT'S ON OPINION

THU, 28 AUG, 2025 - 11:05

UHW Gynae getting ready for World GO Day

World Gynae Oncology Day 2024 Including the Dip In Dunmore East by UHW consultants, staff & friends as part of GO Campaign. Credit: UHW

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ONLINE COVERAGE

Irish Medical Times

Reach: 2,304

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HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

ONLINE COVERAGE

Stir the Jam

Reach: 475

World GO Day: 1 in 7 Women Too Embarrassed to Visit GP with Cancer Warning Signs

World Gynaecological Oncology Day (World GO Day) takes place on Saturday, 20th September 2025. On this day, patients, advocates, and medical professionals around the world unite to raise awareness of all five types of gynaecological cancers (vulval, vaginal, cervical, uterine, and ovarian), promote early detection, and support affected women globally through open conversations.

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HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

BROADCAST COVERAGE

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Irish Network for Gynaecological Oncology

HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

BROADCAST COVERAGE

Today FM (Dave Moore)

Listenership: 198,000

Newstalk (Breakfast)

Listenership: 165,000

BROADCAST COVERAGE

Community Radio Kilkenny City
Listenership: 10,000

Community Radio Kilkenny City (replay)
Listenership: 10,000

CRCfm
Listenership: 11,920

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Irish Network for Gynaecological Oncology

HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

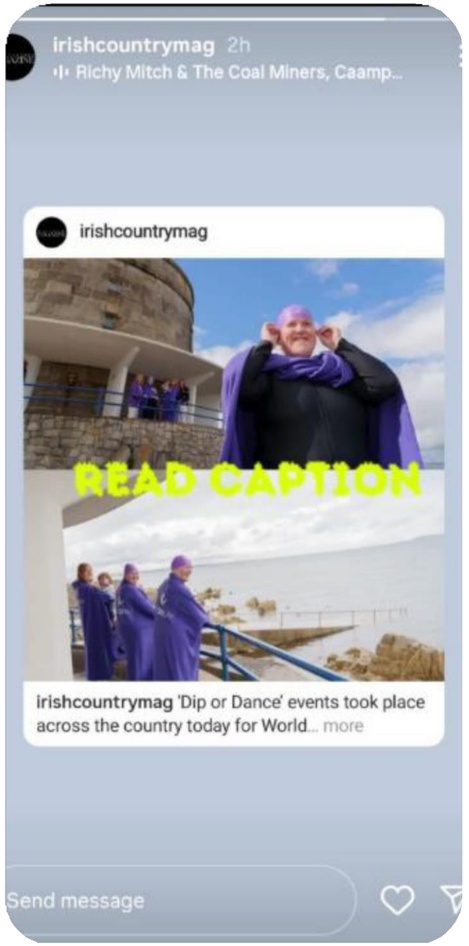
SOCIAL COVERAGE

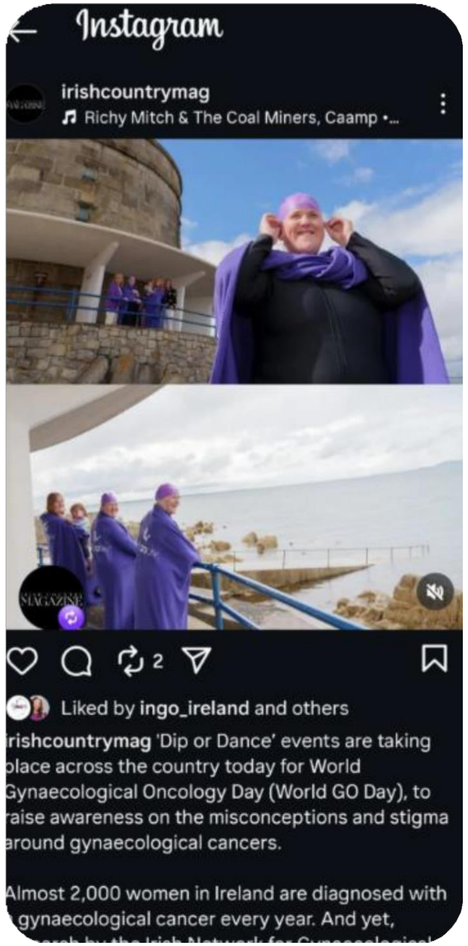
INGO
Irish Network for Gynaecological Oncology

HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

SOCIAL COVERAGE

Irish Country Magazine (Instagram):
Reach: 85,600





INGO
Irish Network for Gynaecological Oncology

HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

SOCIAL COVERAGE

Independent.ie (Instagram):

Reach: 188,000

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Irish Network for Gynaecological Oncology

HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

SOCIAL COVERAGE

Miriam O'Callaghan (Instagram):
Reach: 155,700

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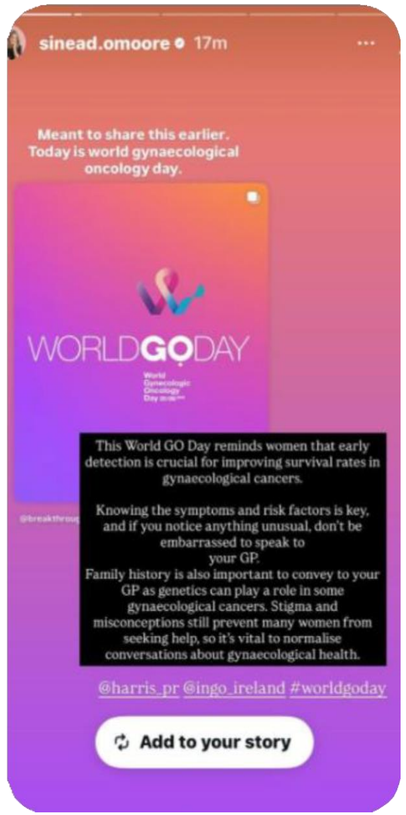
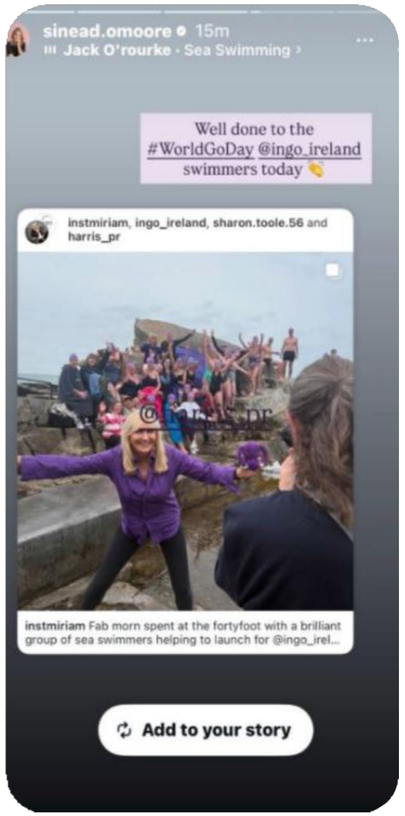
SOCIAL COVERAGE

Sinead Moore (Instagram):

Reach: 69,000





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HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

SOCIAL COVERAGE

Stephanie Buckley (Instagram):

Reach: 138,000

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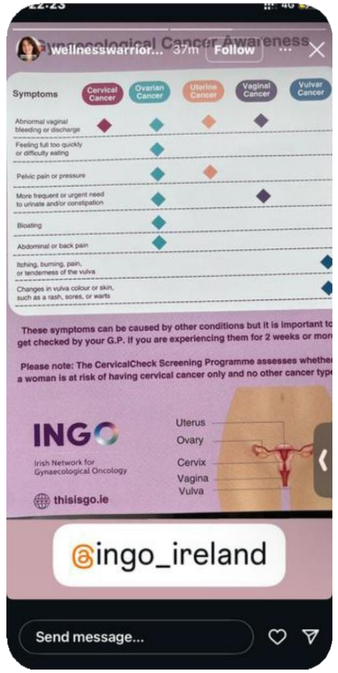
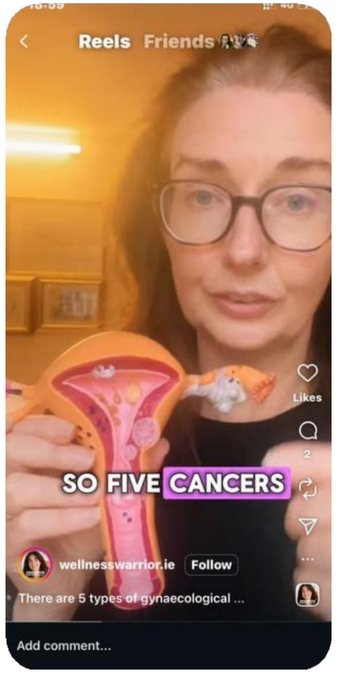
HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

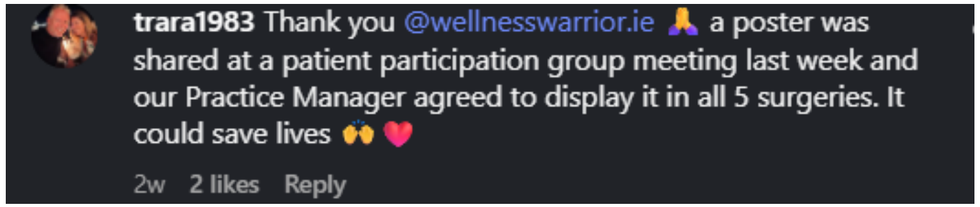
SOCIAL COVERAGE

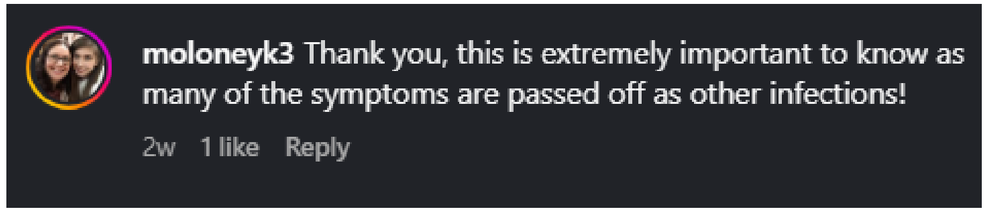
Catherine O'Keffe (Instagram):

Reach: 161,700









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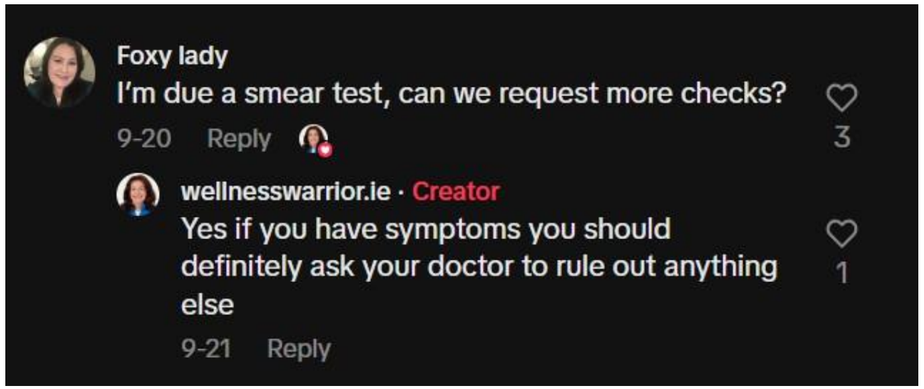
HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

SOCIAL COVERAGE

Catherine O'Keeffe (TikTok):

Reach: 14,800



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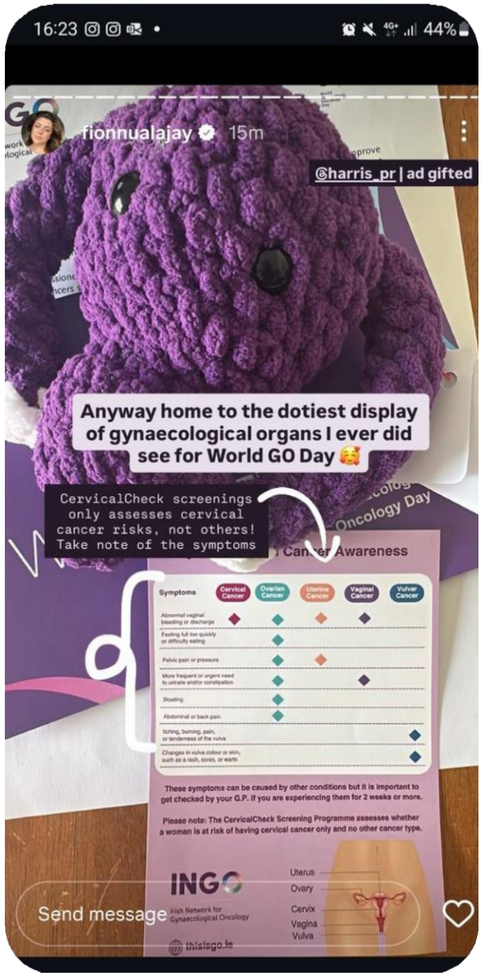
HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

SOCIAL COVERAGE

Fionnuala Jay (Instagram):

Reach: 68,300



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HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

SOCIAL COVERAGE

Triona Collins (Instagram):

Reach: 2,452

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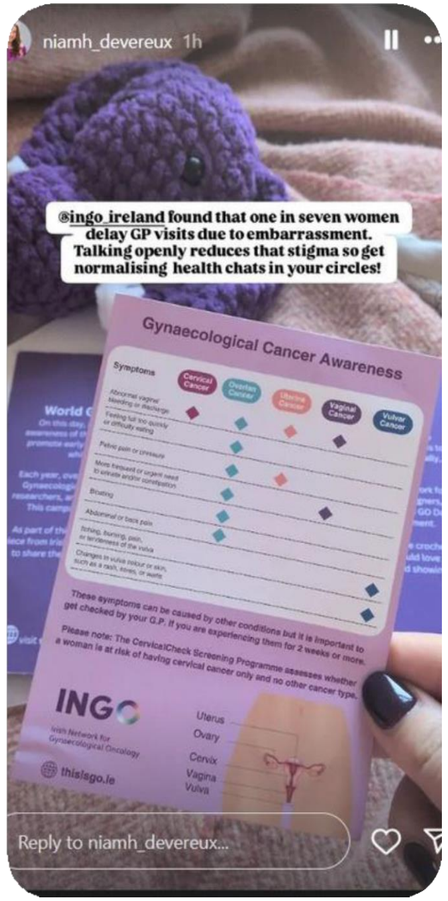
HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

SOCIAL COVERAGE

Niamh Devereux (Instagram):

Reach: 11,668



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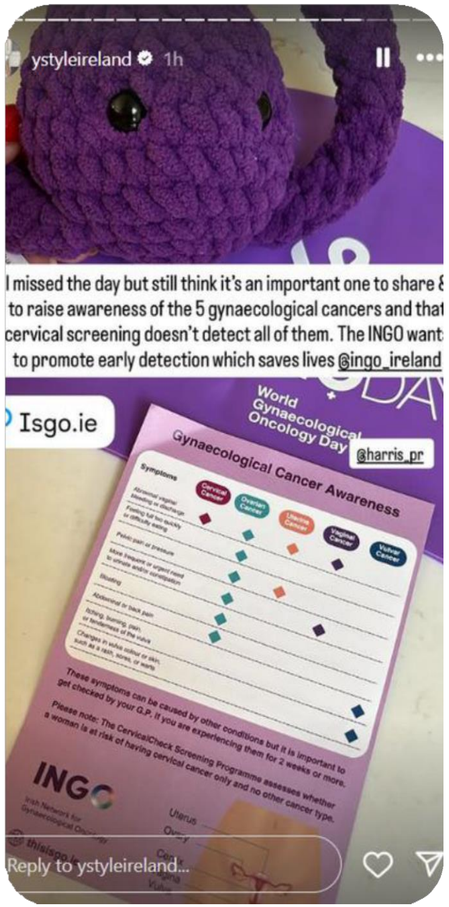
HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

SOCIAL COVERAGE

Yvonne Melinn (Instagram):

Reach: 184,000



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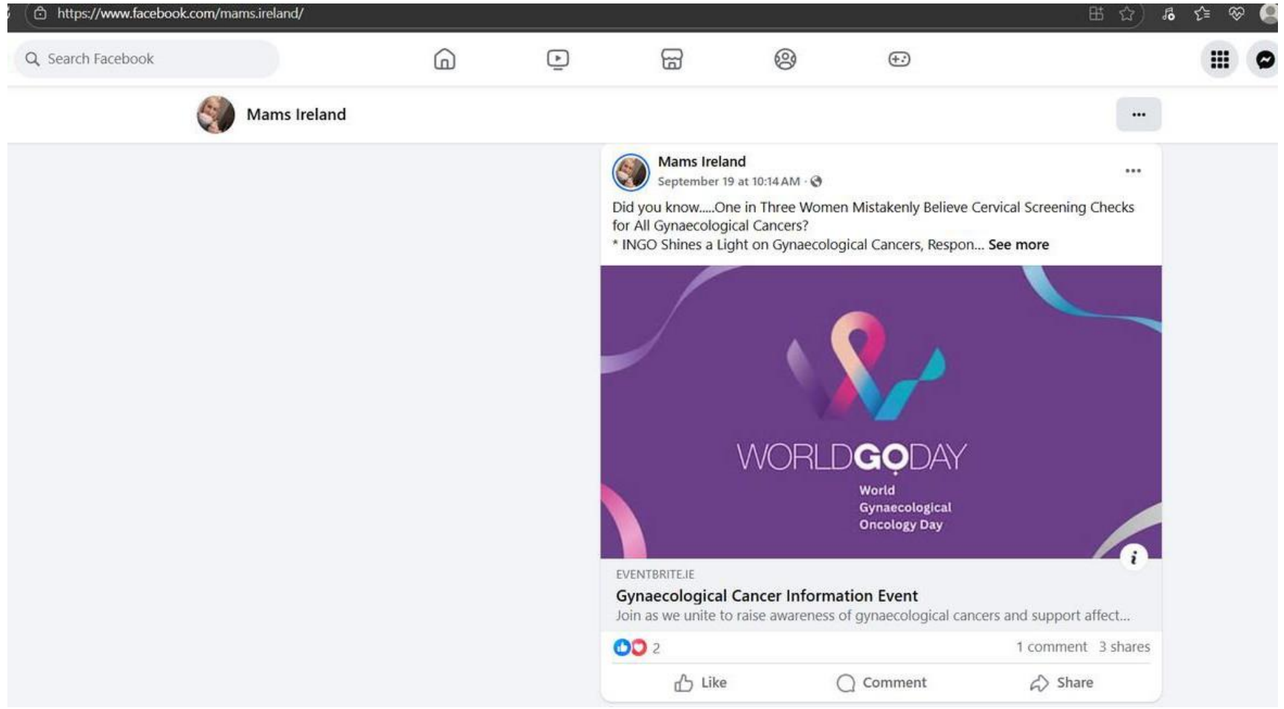
HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

SOCIAL COVERAGE

Mams Ireland (Facebook):

Reach: 23,000



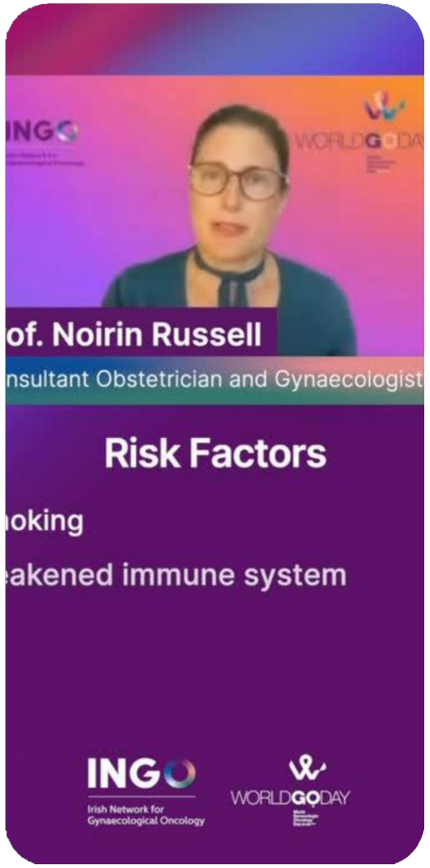
INGO
Irish Network for Gynaecological Oncology

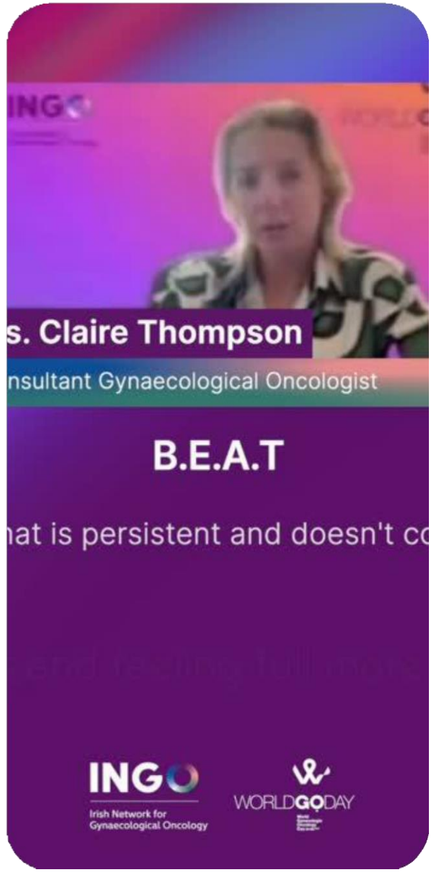
HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

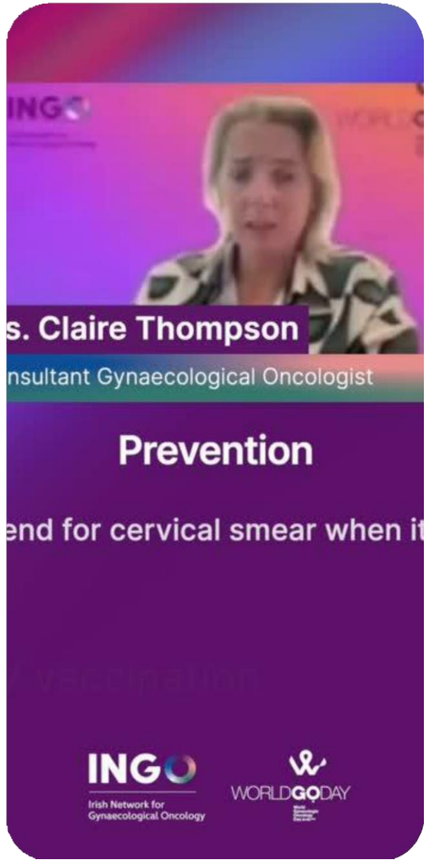
WEBINAR

INGO Irish Network for Gynaecological Oncology
WORLDGODAY
Sponsored by ncp National Cancer Control Programme

World Gynaecological Oncology (GO) Day







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WEBINAR

INGO Irish Network for Gynaecological Oncology
WORLDGODAY
Sponsored by ncccp National Cancer Control Programme

World Gynaecological Oncology (GO) Day

INGO

Irish Network for
Gynaecological Oncology

HARRIS
PUBLIC RELATIONS

Swims from Across the country

Dublin
Galway
Mayo
Cork
Louth
Donegal

INGO
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Information Event

HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

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Irish Network for
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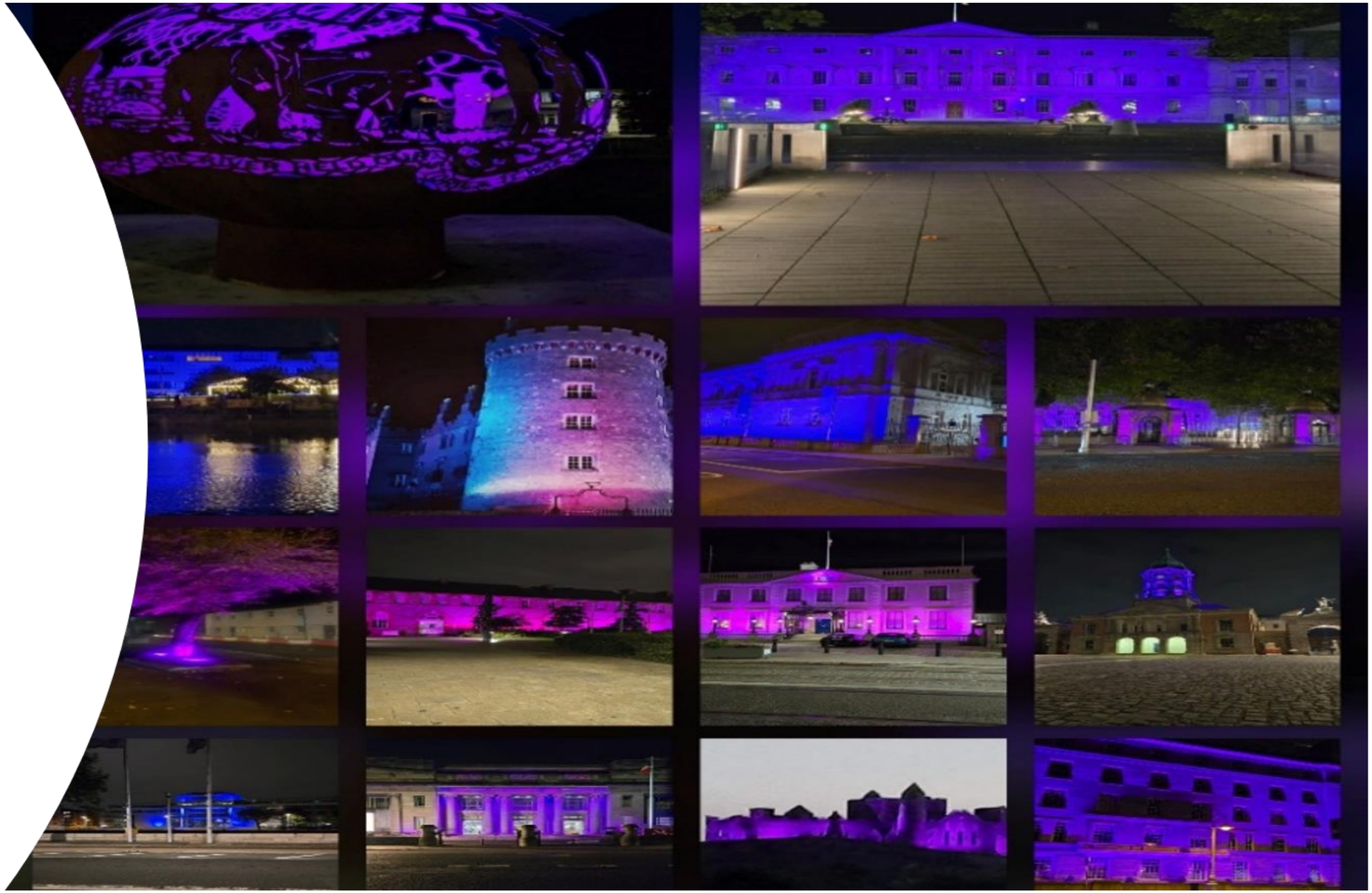
HARRIS
PUBLIC RELATIONS



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HARRIS
PUBLIC RELATIONS

THANK YOU.