



Irish Examiner

Inside: 16-page tribute special to campaigner Vicky Phelan

Tuesday, November 15, 2022

www.irishexaminer.com

No. 62,631

€2.40 (£1.70 in N. Ireland)



Thank you, Vicky

Vicky Phelan made the personal political the day she stood outside the High Court on April 25, 2018, to make a statement to a knot of journalists. She had just been awarded a €2.5m settlement, without an admission of liability, against Clinical Pathology Laboratories for an incorrect smear test result. Despite having terminal cancer, she was not about to go quietly. She wanted the truth to be known so that others were not left in the dark by CervicalCheck as she had been.

Challenging the medical establishment at every step, she asked questions about her treatment and independently researched new drugs to extend her life. She believed she would have died within months if she had followed the proposed palliative care plan. Instead, she lived for another five years, travelling to the US for treatment and driven on by her insatiable will.

Bright and articulate, she

Irish Examiner view

held our politicians to account, highlighting that they are answerable to the people who elected them. Then taoiseach Leo Varadkar and health minister Simon Harris were in regular contact, and both met her in person. She knew she had political power and used it to find a way to redress the injustice visited on her and the other 220-plus women affected by the scandal.

She later lobbied politicians, asking them to vote for legislation to support assisted dying for terminally ill people. Her logic was simple and compelling: She was a terminally ill woman who wanted to control how she died and not suffer unnecessarily.

Though the screening programme failed to protect her, she supported CervicalCheck, asking

women to continue to get their smear tests. It was the theme of her guest-edited edition of the *Irish Examiner's* 'Feelgood' supplement in March 2019.

She was prepared to sacrifice her privacy to drive the message home of how devastating cervical cancer can be. In 'Feelgood', she spoke about the invasive radiation treatment she'd received and its effect on her sex life. In response to the article, the Irish Cancer Society provided €400,000 to set up two pilot clinics in Dublin and Cork to support women who've had treatment for gynaecological and breast cancers.

We have a long and proud history of fearless women leaders, and Vicky Phelan rightly joins this pantheon. By speaking out, she gave a voice to those who feel invisible in the face of bureaucracy. And she showed us all how to face adversity with grit and grace.

Vicky Phelan, 1974 -2022

