

## Research Article

# Awareness about Cervical Cancer amongst Women in a Campaign

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## Abstract

**Objectives:** to assess the basic knowledge and information regarding cervical cancer amongst women who attended a cervical cancer awareness campaign.

**Methods:** A cervical Cancer awareness campaign was carried out in January 2016 at an academic hospital, Women's Specialized Hospital, King Fahad Medical City, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on the same day. A cross sectional survey was performed where a questionnaire was completed by interviewing patients, staff, allied health care providers and physicians. All interested attendees who attended the awareness campaign were eligible for interview; however, one hundred thirty one candidates were interviewed at random. They were asked questions pertaining to their knowledge and beliefs of cervical cancer specifically on to its causes, preventive and possible treatment strategies. All the information was collected and entered into excel sheet. The statistical analysis was done using excel program. IRB approval was granted from the hospital for publication of the results.

**Results:** One hundred thirty one participants have answered the questionnaire. One hundred fourteen patients (87%) women believed that the cause of cervical cancer was due Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), and 17 (13%) believed it was Hereditary. Eight (6%) participants have answered that abnormal vaginal bleeding was the main symptom of cervical cancer, 10 (7.6%) answered that it was abnormal vaginal discharge and 113 (86.3%) said it is both. When the women were asked about cervical screening, 118 (90.1%) said it was by a pap smear and 13 (9.9%) women said it was by taking a blood sample. One hundred and nine (83.2%) participants said that there is a vaccine, which can be administered in order to prevent cervical cancer and 22 (16.8%), said that there was no vaccine.

**Conclusion:** Most women had a good basic knowledge about the screening method and the preventive measures applied for cervical cancer; however, a small percentage of women need to be aware about the preventive measures, in order to avoid such a drastic preventable occurrence. This is where the role of health care providers and awareness campaigns lies.

## Keywords

- Cervical cancer
- Cervical screening
- Pap smear
- HPV

## INTRODUCTION

Cervical cancer is a preventable disease, and thus early diagnosis and treatment should be offered to all women. Cervical cancer is a highly preventable with regular screening tests and appropriate follow-up care. It also can be cured when found early and treated [1]. Cervical cancer is the third most common cancer in women worldwide, and the seventh overall, with an estimated 530,000 new cases in 2008 [2]. The highest incidence rates of cervical cancer are found in Central and South America, East Africa, South and South-East Asia, and the Western Pacific [3]. The incidence of cervical cancer is very low in Saudi Arabia, ranking number 12 between all cancers in females and accounts only for 2.4% of all new cases [4]. The current information from the SCR and the WHO/ICO indicates that the incidence of cervical

cancer in Saudi Arabia is 2.1/100,000 women. The advancements in medicine and treatments offered to diagnose and treat cervical cancer can cure up to 95% of women with early stage disease (stages I and II) and 60% with stage III disease [5]. Risk factors include age, parity, marital status, age at first intercourse, number of sexual partners, and cigarette smoking [1].

Human papillomavirus (HPV) remains the most significant causative factor for cervical cancer, and most commonly HPV 16 and 18 [6]. Each year, about 14 million people become newly infected [7]. Vaccines are available and they help in the prevention of HPV infection; the vaccines should be given before the person becomes sexually active since it does not treat an already existing infection [8]. It has also to be remembered that vaccines do not prevent other HPV types causing cancer and thus women have

**Table 1:** Women's responses.

Question	(N)	(%)
<b>What is the most common cause of cervical cancer?</b>		
Human papilloma virus	114	87
Hereditary	17	13
<b>What are the main symptoms of cervical cancer?</b>		
Abnormal bleeding from the vagina	8	6.1
Abnormal discharge from the vagina	10	7.6
All of the above	113	86.2
<b>How is cervical cancer screening performed?</b>		
Pap Smear	118	90
Blood Sample	13	10
<b>Is there a vaccine that protects against cervical cancer?</b>		
Yes	109	83.2
No	22	16.8

to be screened with Pap tests to detect any abnormality in the cervix that can also cause cancers. Therefore, people who have gotten the vaccine still should have regular Pap tests to screen for abnormalities.

## METHODS

A cervical Cancer awareness campaign was carried out in January 2016 at an academic hospital, Women's Specialized Hospital, King Fahad Medical City, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. A cross sectional survey was performed where a questionnaire was completed by interviewing patients, staff, allied health care providers and physicians inside the hospital and outside. All interested attendees who attended the awareness campaign were eligible for interview; however, one hundred thirty one candidates were interviewed at random. They were asked questions pertaining to their knowledge and beliefs of cervical cancer specifically on to its causes, preventive and possible treatment strategies. All the information was collected and entered into excel sheet. The statistical analysis was done using excel program. IRB approval was granted from the hospital for publication of the results.

## RESULTS

One hundred thirty one participants have answered the questionnaire. One hundred fourteen patients (87%) women believed that the cause of cervical cancer was due Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), and 17 (13%) believed it was Hereditary. Eight (6%) participants have answered that abnormal vaginal bleeding was the main symptom of cervical cancer, 10 (7.6%) answered that it was abnormal vaginal discharge and 113 (86.3%) said it is both. When the women were asked about cervical screening, 118 (90.1%) said it was by a pap smear and 13 (9.9%) women said it was by taking a blood sample. One hundred and nine (83.2%) participants said that there is a vaccine, which can be administered in order to prevent cervical cancer and 22 (16.8%), said that there was no vaccine.

## DISCUSSION

The Pap smear is an important mean of cervical cancer

screening today. Its importance relies on its high effectiveness in preventing cervical cancer [3]. A Pap smear can detect abnormal changes to the cervix long before they become cancerous. Therefore, we have conducted an earlier study in Saudi Arabia to determine the prevalence of abnormal Pap smear results among subfertile women attending an infertility clinic [1]. Pap smear was done for 241 (48.9%) of 493 subfertile women from January 2008 through February 2009. The results were normal for 166 of 241 patients (67.9%), abnormal for 71 (29.5%), and unsatisfactory for evaluation in 4 (1.7%) patients. Precancerous lesions were found in 7 (2.9%), inflammation in 55 (22.8%) and infection in 9 (3.7%) patients. We have found a high prevalence of abnormal Pap smears in our subfertile women and thus recommended the need of screening in patients eligible for infertility treatment. In addition, we have found that there is lack of public awareness on the importance of Pap smears in Saudi Arabia, and consequently we have recommended a well-organized screening program for cervical cell abnormalities at the national level since it will allow identification of women at risk for which early, potentially lifesaving measures can be taken. Years to follow this study, an awareness campaign was held at our hospital and found that there are a good number of women who are aware about cervical cancer and its consequences. Women in the campaign had a good basic knowledge about the screening method and the preventive measures applied for cervical cancer; however, a small group of women is still in need for education about cervical cancer and the available screening tests.

In 2008, a study was published after assessing the awareness, knowledge, and beliefs about human papillomavirus (HPV) in a racially diverse sample of young adults. This included 124 students, ages between 18 and 26 years from two southeastern universities. The survey assessed the demographic characteristics, sexual history, awareness and knowledge of HPV, HPV-related beliefs, interest in learning more about HPV, and interest in the HPV vaccine. More than 75% of the students have heard of HPV. Women reported more awareness and knowledge of HPV in comparison to men, and those with who were sexually active and those with multiple sexual partners perceived more awareness [9].

The results in our hospital might be applicable to the other hospitals in Saudi Arabia and therefore, we do recommend similar awareness campaigns to be done in other hospital in Saudi Arabia, in order to understand the level of awareness amongst other group of participants in the same region.

There was an interesting article published in The Lancet Oncology, whereby the authors have emphasized on the need to have more effective screening programs by enhancing and supporting extensive public awareness campaigns about a preventable disease such as cervical cancer.

It has to be remembered, that besides Pap smear, HPV DNA test has also been for cervical screening purpose [9]. Awareness and early treatment will prevent cervical cancer deadly aftermath along with the other personal, marital, social, cultural, emotional burdens, and medical consequences that follows.

## CONCLUSION

Most women in the campaign had a good basic knowledge about the screening method and the preventive measures applied for cervical cancer; however, a small percentage of women need to be aware about the preventive measures, in order to avoid such a drastic preventable occurrence. This is where the role of health care providers and awareness campaigns lies in increasing women's knowledge about the disease and recognition to perform screening tests.

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