

Cervical Health Awareness Month (OCAPICA's Prize Contest®)

January starts off the year as National Cervical Health Awareness Month. National Cervical Health Awareness Month was established in order to enhance awareness about cervical health issues, such as prevention of cervical cancer and HPV (Human Papilloma Virus) infections and the importance of screening.

Each year over 10,000 women in the United States are diagnosed with cervical cancer. Vietnamese women get cervical cancer more often than most other women (43 per 100,000) in the United States because many do not get regular Pap tests and screenings. Among women aged 30-54 years and 55-69 years, Vietnamese women have the highest rate of cervical cancer.

The cervix is part of a woman's reproductive system. It connects the vagina to the uterus and plays an important part during a woman's pregnancy and childbirth. Before cancer appears, the cervix goes through slight changes where abnormal cells begin to appear. Later, these abnormal cells can become cancer cells and start to grow and spread. Cervical cancer usually develops slowly, so early detection is the best defense.

There is the preconceived notion that only middle-aged women are prone to getting cervical cancer, when in fact, any woman that is or has been sexually active are at risk. The risk for developing cervical cancer increases: in women who do not receive regular Pap tests, if you or your partner have or had multiple partners, if you have a history of genital warts or HPV infection, and/or if you smoke. Oftentimes, there are no **symptoms** of cervical cancer but symptoms can include: abnormal vaginal bleeding (such as between periods), smelly vaginal discharge, pelvic pain, and/or vaginal bleeding after menopause. But these symptoms are not always a sign of cervical cancer. So it is important to consult your doctor if these symptoms occur.

The main types of treatment for cervical cancer are surgery (may include a hysterectomy), radiation therapy, and chemotherapy. The type of treatment depends on which is most appropriate for each case. Each treatment has a survival rate of 85% to 90%. And if the cancer has spread to other parts of the body, then more or other types of treatment may be needed.

A **Pap test** can be the best defense against cervical cancer because it can detect about 95% of all cervical cancers and precancerous cervical conditions. The Pap test is almost always done with the yearly pelvic exam. A Pap test and pelvic exam are important and should be part of a woman's health care routine. A Pap test can treat abnormalities in the cervix before they become cancerous. It is recommended that all women 18 years and older or under 18 years who have been sexually active have a Pap test and pelvic exam every year. Even women who have gone through menopause are still encouraged to get Pap tests. **During the Pap test**, that takes only couple minutes, the doctor or nurse wipes a tiny

brush on the cervix in the vagina. And this sample is tested under microscope for abnormal cell growth and infections. A few days **after taking the test**, if one does not receive her result, she should ask her doctor for it; and never assume that her doctor does not call and tell her the result, she is perfectly healthy. If the Pap test is abnormal it can mean there is an infection or abnormal cell changes that could lead to cancer. Then there are additional tests and several treatments to treat the abnormalities.

HPV (Human Papilloma Virus) is a group of viruses that cause infection. Some types of HPV are spread through genital sexual contact. Most HPV infections go away on their own. However, some may not. The infections that do not go away can lead to cell changes in the cervix, which can then lead to cancer. HPV infection is the primary risk factor for cervical cancer because almost all cervical cancer cases are caused by HPV! HPV is so common that by age 50, 8 of 10 women who are or have been sexually active will become infected. The Food and Drug Administration recently licensed a vaccine, Gardasil, to prevent cervical cancer and other diseases caused by HPV for women ages 9-26 years. So, the vaccination is a series of 3 shots over a 6-month period. The vaccination does not prevent all kinds of HPV and will not prevent all cases of cervical cancer. So it is still very important for women to continue getting regular Pap tests.

Fear of a Pap test should not deter any woman from receiving one. Remember that Pap tests can save your life and with regular screening cervical cancer is almost completely preventable and curable!

There are also **free cervical cancer screenings** and treatment for cancer patients who meet the qualifications (California resident, low income, no medical insurance or no insurance coverage). OCAPICA, community medical centers, and family doctors can help women sign up for these free screenings. By the way, all of us should remind ladies getting health check ups. "Because you love your family and yourself, take good care of your health!"

In this January, OCAPICA opens the Prize Contest about Cervical Cancer to Vietnamese members. There will be **12 cash prizes: 2 grand prizes of \$100 each and 10 prizes of \$50 each**. One can download the questionnaire at www.ocapica.org then fax to 714-636-8828 or email to lhuynh@ocapica.org. The deadline is 2/28/2007 (postmarked, emailed, or faxed).

All participants are invited to an event meeting where winners will be announced and given prizes at NguoiViet News Conference Room (14771 Moran St, Westminster CA 92683), on Friday 3/16/2007, from 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm. There will be CDs giveaways, entertainment, food, and drinks. Please RSVP by calling Lucy Huynh at 714-530-2323 (Vietnamese phone line) or emailing to lhuynh@ocapica.org.

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