



Report on the Cervical Cancer Month Awareness Events in September 2006

Hosted by the

Africa Centre for Health and Population Studies



Microbicides Development Programme



&

KwaMsane & Madwaleni District Clinics





MDP Cervical Cancer Month Report

The Africa Centre Microbicides Development Programme (MDP) joined in partnership KwaMsane and Madwaleni District Clinics to organise a Cervical Cancer Month Awareness Event on the 26th and 27th September 2006 to raise awareness of Cervical Cancer. This report provides a summary of the event.

This report displays the Light Blue (teal) and White Cervical Cancer Ribbon in order to show our commitment to informing women about cervical cancer and encouraging women to screen for cervical cancer.

Microbicides Development Programme

The Africa Centre for Health and Population Studies is one of six sites in the Microbicides Development Programme (MDP) network. Microbicides have been researched for the last 20 years and there are a number of different types. The microbicide we are testing is a gel which contains a product called PRO2000 which we **hope** will prevent women from getting HIV during vaginal sex. We hope that it will do this by stopping HIV from being able to attach to human cells in the vagina, so stopping HIV infection. The gel is in an applicator and should be inserted into the vagina by the women up to 1 hour before sex. We don't know yet if the gels do work, which is why we need to do this study. **We do know that condoms work, so we ask women to try to use condoms with the gel whenever possible.**

The Africa Centre MDP study focuses on improving women's sexual health by trying to find another way in which women can protect themselves against HIV and some other Sexually Transmitted Infections. Due to our commitment to improving women's sexual health, we offer all women who join the study a Pap Smear to detect a sexually transmitted infection called the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), which is the leading cause of Cervical Cancer. We wanted to take the opportunity of Cervical Cancer month to inform more women about cervical cancer, about the need to use condoms to protect themselves against HPV and HIV, and the benefits of Pap Smear screening.

To find out about the study, you can visit or phone the microbicide clinics for more information at:

- Mtubatuba Clinic - 0824251593
- KwaMsane Clinic - 0824245318
- Madwaleni Clinic - 076182 9179

MDP Cervical Cancer Awareness Event

The Microbicides Development Programme posted over 25 posters in isiZulu across the Umkanyakude District in District Clinics, shops, banks, and markets. The posters promoted Cervical Cancer Awareness Month by providing information about cervical cancer and cervical cancer screening.

On 26th and 27th September 2006, the Africa Centre Microbicides Development Programme Team invited women to the clinics at KwaMsane and Madwaleni. Women were given information on cervical cancer and Pap smear screening. The team, in partnership with these Department of Health District Health Clinics, offered all women, who were eligible for a test according to the South African Cervical Cancer





Screening Programme, a free Pap smear. The smears were then given to the District Clinics who conducted the tests and gave women their results.

The event was a great success in disseminating information about cervical cancer and the benefits of regular screening for cancer of the cervix. Over the two days the MDP teams:

- **Talked to 850 women about cervical cancer and the benefits of Pap smear screening.**
- **Handed out over 1,200 Cancer Association of South Africa (CANSA) leaflets about Cervical Cancer in isiZulu.**
- **Explained the multiple benefits of using condoms during sex, demonstrated how to use both male and female condoms, and handed out over 300 condoms.**
- **Provided 22 women with free pap smears – at least 2 of which were referred for colposcopy following abnormal findings.**

All District Clinics in the area provide free Pap smears and we will continue to encourage women to regularly screen for cervical cancer in line with the Department of Health Cervical Cancer Screening Programme.

Anyone can drop into the MDP clinics at Mtubatuba, KwaMsane and Madwaleni any time to find out more about cervical cancer, to pick up a CANSA leaflet about cervical cancer, to collect condoms, and to find out more about the MDP study.





The Africa Centre MDP team would like to thank the Department of Health District Clinics at Mtubatuba, KwaMsane and Madwaleni for their support, and the community for their participation.

The Africa Centre MDP team plan to repeat this event during the National Reproductive Health Month in February 2007.

Wear one of the many ribbons that raise awareness about Women's Reproductive Health this February

Red Ribbon: HIV and AIDS Awareness



Light Blue & White Ribbon: Cervical Cancer Awareness



Light Green Ribbon: Sexually Transmitted Infections Awareness



For any additional information please contact Mitzy Gafos (Africa Centre MDP Project Leader) on mgafos@afriacentre.ac.za or +27 (0) 72 798 3158





Appendix 1: Information distributed through posters and talks during the MDP Cervical Cancer Month Awareness Event

What is Cervical Cancer?

- / Cervical Cancer develops when abnormal cells in the cervix are left untreated, and turn into cancer.
- / Women in developing countries account for about 85 percent of both the yearly cases of cervical cancer (estimated at 493,000 cases worldwide) and the yearly deaths from cervical cancer (estimated at 273,500 deaths worldwide).
- / In the majority of developing countries, cervical cancer remains the number-one cause of cancer-related deaths among women.
- / Cervical Cancer is the second most common form of cancer amongst South Africa women.
- / Approximately 1 in every 41 women will, within their lifetime, develop this form of cancer in South Africa.
- / Cervical Cancer is associated with certain strains of a sexually transmitted virus called the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). However, not all women with HPV infection will develop cervical cancer.
- / Other possible risk factors for cervical cancer include:
 - Giving birth to many children;
 - You or your partner having more than 1 sexual partner;
 - Having first sexual intercourse at a young age;
 - Smoking cigarettes;
 - Oral contraceptive use ("the Pill");
 - Weakened immune system (especially HIV infection).
- / Cervical cancer is one of the few cancers that can be detected early through regular screening.
- / A sexually active woman who does not have cervical cancer screening on a regular basis significantly increases her chances of developing cervical cancer.
- / Progression of the disease is slow and may take as long as 10 - 20 years before the disease becomes invasive.

What can I do to prevent Cervical Cancer?

- / Use condoms during sex to prevent the spread of the human papilloma virus and other sexually transmitted infections;
- / Postpone sexual activity to older age;
- / Have sexually transmitted infections treated;
- / Decrease parity (the number of births);
- / Stop smoking or preferably never start smoking;
- / Have Papanicolaou smears (Pap smears).

What is a Pap smear?

- / Papanicolaou smears (Pap smears) to detect cervical abnormalities are the best known form of secondary prevention against cervical cancer.
- / Papanicolaou smears (Pap smears) detect cervical abnormalities that may be, or may develop into, cervical cancer.
- / During a Pap smear, cells are collected from the surface of the cervix or vagina:





- The pap smear is taken by a doctor or nurse, who examine you internally. Sometimes this will involve you lying on your back, with your legs bent up and apart, and sometimes lying on your side with your legs bent up.
- The doctor or nurse may examine you internally, with a hand, but the smear test involves inserting a plastic instrument (speculum) into the vagina, which holds the walls of the vagina open, so that they can see the neck of the womb (cervix). A wooden device (spatula), which is usually little more than a specially shaped lolly/popsicle stick, is then stroked round the opening in the neck of the womb.
- You do not usually feel this, although the speculum may cause some discomfort. The spatula is left with some cells from the surface of the cervix attached to it. These are smeared on to a glass slide, which is treated with alcohol to preserve the cells.

How will I know if I have cervical cancer?

- Pap Smear specimens are sent off to a special cytology laboratory to be examined under a microscope.
- Examination of the slide is fairly quick, but involves great expertise. Results should be available in the clinic 2 to 4 weeks after having the Pap smear.
- The majority of smears come back normal. Some are normal, but show evidence of other things such as a thrush infection, which are chance findings, not what the smear is designed to detect. You should discuss with the nurse whether and how to act on such chance findings.
- On some occasions there are not enough of the right sort of cells on the slide (a "scanty" smear) for the laboratory to reliably comment. On these occasions they ask for a repeat smear. As a woman gets older the cells of the cervix come away less easily, and sometimes, after a few scanty results, it is best to be referred for a colposcopy that will detect abnormal cells during a genital examination.
- Blood obscures the view of the cells, and the test is not usually performed if you are bleeding. If it has inadvertently been done at the beginning or end of a period, this may be another reason that the laboratory asks for a repeat pap smear.
- If the cells look inflamed, or unusual, suspicious, or actually cancerous, the lab will suggest a repeat smear after a few months, or possibly referral to a specialist (gynaecologist) for a closer look at the cervix using a sort of microscope (colposcopy).
- If the smear is normal, the nurse will suggest you have a routine repeat after a length of time. The average length of time a typical cancer of the cervix takes to develop is 10 to 12 years.
- If the result is abnormal, follow up will be sooner and your nurse will advise.
- Do not get too anxious over inflamed or slightly abnormal smear results. The majority of these settle back to normal with little or no action.
- There are usually no noticeable signs of early cervical cancer, but if cervical abnormalities are detected by a Pap smear very early they are almost 100% curable;

How and when should I have a Pap Smear?

- The South African Cervical Cancer Screening Programme recommends that all women over 30 years of age have a Pap Smear every 10 years. The National Health Service offers 3 free Pap Smears to all South African women;
- All District Clinics can provide Pap smears to eligible women.





What are the Symptoms?

- Early cervical cancer may not cause noticeable signs or symptoms.
- Possible signs of cervical cancer include vaginal bleeding and pelvic pain. These and other symptoms may be caused by cervical cancer. Other conditions may cause the same symptoms.
- A clinician should be consulted if any of the following problems occur:
 - Vaginal bleeding.
 - Unusual vaginal discharge.
 - Pelvic pain.
 - Pain during sexual intercourse.

What is the Prognosis?

- The prognosis (chance of recovery) is better when the cancer is found early.
- The prognosis (chance of recovery) depends on the following:
 - The stage of the cancer (whether it affects part of the cervix, involves the whole cervix, or has spread to the lymph nodes or other places in the body).
 - The type of cervical cancer.
 - The size of the tumor.

What is the Treatment?

- Evidence from many studies show that screening for cervical cancer - before symptoms appear - increases the chances of successful treatment. In fact, precancerous cervical changes and very early cervical cancers are almost 100% curable.
- Treatment options depend on the following:
 - The stage of the cancer.
 - The size of the tumor.
 - The patient's desire to have children.
 - The patient's age.

