



c e r v i c a l c a n c e r

JHPIEGO: Preventing Cervical Cancer through Cost-Effective, Innovative Approaches

JHPIEGO works internationally to improve women's health and the ways in which health care workers are trained to provide essential health interventions. The prevention of cervical cancer is a particularly compelling initiative.

The link between cervical cancer and underdevelopment is much more powerful than is generally appreciated. Well beyond medical costs and lost income, the disease also indirectly encumbers development. Worldwide, cervical cancer is the second most common cancer among women and the leading cause of female cancer deaths in developing countries. Most of the women who die are in their late 30s and 40s. Without a mother, the health of the family, especially young children, is drastically compromised. A mother's death almost always leads to smaller investments in the education for each child, and motherless children are frequently abandoned.

For additional information about JHPIEGO's approaches to cervical cancer prevention, contact Amy Kleine at akleine@jhpiego.net.

An all-out commitment to treating cervical cancer, one of the world's deadliest sexually transmitted infections (STI), would mean improving the lives of hundreds of thousands of women and their families every year. And a new, inexpensive outpatient treatment means we don't have to wait for the vaccine—this is one disease we can begin to eliminate using technology already in hand.

VIA, which stands for visual inspection of the cervix after applying dilute acid (vinegar) to the cervix, is a simple cervical cancer testing method. JHPIEGO has demonstrated that VIA is more sensitive than Pap smears, provides immediate results and can be performed by nurses. Developing a new test, usable anywhere in the world, is only part of eliminating cervical cancer, however. It is also necessary to link the test to a proven treatment. Fortunately, cryotherapy (freezing the abnormal cervical tissue with a liquid coolant such as carbon dioxide) has been successfully used for more than 40 years to treat cervical dysplasia. Combining VIA testing with this inexpensive outpatient treatment, which nurses can provide, puts cost-effective cervical cancer prevention programs within reach of even the poorest countries.

What Can Be Done Now?

Reducing the incidence of cervical cancer would be an extremely cost-effective way to promote development and reduce poverty. So why is this not happening? Until recently, the reason has been the lack of an inexpensive, simple screening test for use in developing countries where Pap smears are rarely available, especially for women living in villages without doctors.

JHPIEGO Steps In

In light of this situation, JHPIEGO, with funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, through the Alliance for Cervical Cancer Prevention (ACCP), has demonstrated that a “*single-visit approach*” (SVA) composed of VIA followed by an offer of treatment with cryotherapy (or referral if necessary) is *safe, acceptable* and *feasible* in a low-resource setting such as rural Thailand. As a result, there is increasing interest in this type of public health approach to a clinical problem in countries around the world. At JHPIEGO, the next step is to translate findings from demonstration projects into programmatic initiatives.

A Death Every 2 Minutes:

- Cervical cancer is the second leading cause of death in developing countries.
- There are 400,000 new cervical cancer cases each year, and 200,000 deaths.
- More than 80% of these fatalities occur in the world’s poorest countries.
- The vast majority (99.7%) of cases are associated with prior infection with one or more oncogenic types of human papillomavirus (HPV).
- Co-infection with HIV is associated with a five- to tenfold increase in severe dysplasia and carcinoma *in situ*, the precursors of invasive cervical cancer.
- Combining visual testing with an inexpensive outpatient treatment could put cost-effective cervical cancer prevention programs within reach of even the poorest countries.

A “single visit approach” in 20 of the poorest countries in Africa and Asia could cost as little as \$11 per person-life saved. Contrast this with the fact that cervical cancer is a leading cause of premature deaths among women in these countries, and the benefits of preventing the disease clearly exceed the cost, both socially and financially.

JHPIEGO is committed to offering programs designed to eliminate this disease using simple testing and treatment approaches applicable anywhere in the world. Efforts to prevent cervical cancer are an investment in humankind, global economic health and our own interests.

For 32 years, JHPIEGO has been committed to improving the health of women and families throughout the world. JHPIEGO is dedicated to excellence—ensuring delivery of high-quality services and strengthening human capacity development. As an affiliate of The Johns Hopkins University, JHPIEGO draws on the University’s extensive expertise to develop innovative responses to the challenges of today’s reproductive health needs.