

Assessment of Awareness towards Pap Smear among Nursing Staff – Experience at A Tertiary Care Hospital.

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ABSTRACT

Cancer of the cervix, is second most frequent cancer among the Indian women. To bring down the burden of cancer, in addition to opportunistic cervical cytology along with Mass screening programs, it is imperative to involve nursing staff & paramedical personnel in educating the masses. This cross sectional study describes findings of a pilot screening program, undertaken among nursing staff of a tertiary care hospital. It was found that even among the educated nursing staff there is low level of awareness for usage of pap testing. Cervical cytology revealed wide variety of inflammatory lesions. With the low doctor to population, involvement of the nursing personnel for Periodical cytological screening for prevention of cervical cancer would go a long way in early detection of various cervical abnormalities and increasing awareness among them.

Keywords: Nursing staff, Pap smear.

INTRODUCTION

Cancers of the Female Genital tract are amongst one of the highest cancer burdens of the world. About 122,844 new cervical cancer cases are diagnosed annually in India.^[1] More than three-fourths of these patients are diagnosed at advanced stages leading to poor prospects of long-term survival and cure. Pap smear screening for early detection of pre-cancerous lesions of cervix is the only cost-effective and well-established technique available and used all over the world. It has additional benefit in detection of some common sexually transmitted infections in a single smear.^[2]

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Cytological screening of the cervix using Pap smear, with appropriate treatment and follow-up is the only proven strategy for the prevention of cervical cancer. Cytological screening can be an effective tool in reducing mortality from carcinoma of the cervix.^[3] Organized population based screening programs have been shown to reduce the incidence and mortality from cervical cancer in many developed countries.^[4] Opportunistic cervical cytology along with Mass screening programs are

being undertaken by various governmental & nongovernmental organizations. However, until awareness and caution against cancer cervix rises among the general population, it remains an arduous task to prevent cervical cancer. Promotion and education is needed to prevent incidence of cervical cancer.^[5]

In a developing country like India with a wide doctor to population ratio, it is imperative to involve nursing staff & paramedical personnel in educating the masses. Nurses play an integral role in educating women in prevention of diseases and health promotion and can influence cervical cancer screening adherence and health activities among women. It has been shown that recommendation of cervical cancer screening to individuals by medical professionals, including nurses, effectively improves screening coverage among the general population. Therefore, nurses should have current and accurate knowledge about Cervical cancer and Pap smear to promote informed decisions about cervical cancer screening.^[6]

MATERIALS & METHODS

This cross sectional study was carried out among 74 nurses of Indira Gandhi Government Medical College, Nagpur over a period of 3 months (Jan to March 2014).The nursing staff was motivated to participate in the study & volunteer to get them

tested and to undergo the PAP smear test. Detailed clinical history regarding menstruation, marital status, age at marriage, years of marriage, obstetric history, past & present history of any gynecological complaints, family history of malignancy were taken. Gynecological examination comprising of per speculum & per vaginam examination were done & then PAP smears were taken with Ayre's spatula by trained gynecologists. Simultaneously a structured self administered objective type questionnaire devised by us based on basic awareness, was provided to each one of them. The Questionnaire was developed to assess the knowledge of the nurses, vis-a-vis risk factors for cervical cancer development, role of Pap smear in detection of cancerous as well as precancerous lesions of cervix, curability of precancerous lesions, role of HPV vaccine etc. The format & language was kept simple & easy to comprehend & was written both in English & Marathi. The

respondents results were studied & interpreted by scoring them.

RESULTS

The socio-demographic characters of the subjects were studied in accordance with their Age, Marital status, menstrual history, History of symptoms (if any), usage of contraception, and family history of cervical cancer and depicted in [Table 1]. Majority of our nurse participants were of age group between 40-49 yrs followed by 50-59 yrs. Only three nurses in their thirties participated in the study. Of our 74 participants, only one was unmarried & never had sexual exposure. Of the 73 married women, only 10 had used contraception. 22 of these women have had their menopause, while the other 52 were premenopausal. Four women also had history of Cancers in the family.

Table 1: Sociodemographic Characteristics of Subjects

Sociodemographic Variables			
Age (In Years)	No. of Subjects		
30-39	3		
40-49	48		
50-59	22		
>60	1		
Marital Status	No. of Subjects	Family H/O* Cancer	No. of Subjects
Married	73	Yes	4
Single	1	No	70
Contraception Used	No. of Subjects	Menstrual Status	
Yes	10	Pre-menopausal	52
No	64	Post- menopausal	22

*H/O: History of

The Objective type Questionnaire was analyzed. Scores were calculated by assigning one point for each correct true or false for each question. Scores out of 10 were given to each of them and the results regarding the Knowledge of the nursing subjects were evaluated. The results have proved to be an eye opener, as more than 60% nurses [Table 2] of our tertiary care hospital did not have any idea about the pap smear screening at the time of carrying out this study. Not only they have limited understanding of cervical cancer screening, but also show poor disposition towards undergoing screening themselves. 45% of our subjects suffered

with one or other symptoms like white discharge, pruritus, intermenstrual bleed. Only 37 % ever consulted a doctor for these problems. As compared to the knowledge of Pap smear (37 %), practice was as low as 18 %. Not surprisingly, only (0.08 %) had knowledge about the HPV Vaccine.

DISCUSSION

Specific knowledge on cervical cancer is a critical element in determining whether a woman will undergo Pap test or not.

Table 2: Questionnaire And Respondent's Knowledge

Questions	Responses	
	Yes	No
1. Aware of Health Related Issues In Women	60 (81.08%)	14 (18.91%)
2. Aware of Various Disease Symptomatology	60 (81.08%)	14 (18.91%)
3. Meeting With Doctor In Recent Past Relating Female Health	24 (32.43 %)	50 (67.5 %)
4. Ever Heard of Cervical Cancer	57 (77.02 %)	17 (22.97 %)
5. Risk Factors A/W Cervical Cancer	34 (45.94%)	40 (54.05 %)
6. Know About Pap Test Screening of Cervical Cancer	28 (37.83%)	46 (62.16 %)
7. Ever Done Pap Test	14 (18.91%)	60 (81.08%)
8. Abnormalities When Found Early, Are Easily Curable	20 (27.02%)	54 (72.97 %)
9. Recommend Test To Friends & Family	74 (100%)	0 (0%)
10. Ever Heard Of HPV Vaccine	6 (0.08 %)	68 (91.89 %)

The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) supports that women fail to be screened due to insufficient resources, lack of knowledge, inability to access the health care delivery system, individual psychosocial and cultural contexts, fear or limited family support and community participation.^[6]

This study was undertaken to identify a feasible strategy to initiate population based cervical screening programme at a tertiary care hospital, in pilot settings. In regard to this a baseline information of the knowledge of Cervical cancer were collected from our nursing personnel to start with. We realised that our nurse respondents needed more knowledge about the causes and risks of cervical cancer. The findings of the study emphasize the need for carrying out more such studies and undertaking regular awareness programs at district hospitals as well as secondary and tertiary care centres. Nurses are the most visible, frontline personnel providing health education to patients and the general population. Nurses should have current and accurate knowledge about Pap smear and Cervical cancer to promote informed decisions about cervical cancer screening.^[7] At a time where WHO CCSP guidelines^[8] plans to train female health workers for motivating the target population, it is essential to find out whether the tertiary care centers have enough knowledgeable nursing staff. Staff nurses if properly trained can constitute a model of health promotion for women, by not just making them aware of the cervical cancer but also by screening all the eligible women at any level of health care.^[9] Building of mass awareness about the importance of cervical screening and workshops for medical and paramedical staff, working to mitigate the effects of social barriers and most importantly training local health care providers in appropriate clinical skills should be cornerstone of any comprehensive cervical cancer prevention & control programs.^[10] Although this study has been done at a very naïve level and more strategic studies with sufficient statistical analysis is required to devise accurate conclusions, we recommend that along with effective screening programs, implementation of training programs to update the knowledge and skills of our most eminent health provider next to the doctor, our nurses, should be undertaken on a large scale. Various Seminars, workshops and orientation programs should be conducted at all levels for the nursing staff. These activities would not only help reduce incidence of cervical cancer among the nursing staff as a whole but would also lead to their better participation in implementation and organization of cervical cancer screening programs including routine check-up as well as in camps.

CONCLUSION

Our study concludes that Strategic analysis of the awareness level of our existing medical & paramedical personnel along with the Screening programs is highly desirable. An informed hospital staff would definitely lead to a improvement of our health care programs. By offering knowledge update to the nursing staff, we will be able, not only to reduce the chances of morbidity among them but also look forward to creating awareness against such preventable diseases to a larger section of society.

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