

Health Bulletin

Study Shows DNA Test Improves Cancer Screening

(NAPSA)—The results of a recently published study may help more women get the benefits of life-saving treatment earlier—when it can do the most good.

The study found that, in women 30 and older, a new test for the virus that causes most cervical cancers is more effective than the Pap smear alone in identifying women needing early intervention to stop the disease. Researchers say the findings also should allow other women—those who test negative for the virus—to avoid unnecessary, invasive follow-up procedures.

The independent study, led by Professor Jack Cuzick, PhD, head of epidemiology for Cancer Research UK at Queen Mary's College in London, was published in *The Lancet*, a leading medical journal.

Called the DNAwithPap Test, the new test detects the presence of human papillomavirus (HPV), which has been shown to cause more than 99 percent of cervical cancers. In contrast, Pap smears rely on visual examination of cervical cells by laboratory technicians for abnormal changes—and thus can produce inexact results. The DNA-based HPV test was recently approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for routine screening of women aged 30 and older in conjunction with a Pap smear.

In the new study, researchers found that HPV testing flagged 97.1 percent of women with cervical cancer or pre-cancerous conditions, compared to 76.6 percent for the Pap smear. This finding, they say, helps explain why invasive cervical cancer often develops after an apparently normal Pap.

"I wish this test had been available to me," says Peggy Clarke of New York, who underwent a radical hysterectomy after being diag-



Many women may have longer, better lives thanks to a new use for DNA research.

nosed with cervical cancer several years ago. "It might have served as an earlier warning signal to my doctor and me that something was wrong."

HPV is a common virus found in up to 75 percent of sexually active women. Researchers believe it is only when the infection persists several years that there is a risk of cancer.

"HPV testing is helping to usher in a new era in cervical cancer prevention," says Marie Savard, MD, an internist, champion of patients' rights and author of two books on patient empowerment. "By knowing if they have HPV, women 30 and older can be monitored more accurately to make sure cervical disease is not missed. In addition, women who are HPV-negative can be reassured, while safely reducing their need for unnecessary, invasive exams. This is very empowering for women."

Because the HPV DNA test is relatively new as a routine screening tool, Dr. Savard recommends that women 30 and older ask their doctors about the HPV test the next time they are scheduled for a Pap smear. The DNAwithPap Test is made by Digene Corp. More information on HPV testing can be found at www.thehpvtest.com.



Note to Editors: January is National Cervical Cancer Screening Month, but this story can help your readers at any time of the year.