

December, 2003

PATIENT POWERline from the desk of Marie Savard, M.D.

RE:Five Things Every Woman Should Know...And Three They Should Ask

Dear Friends,

Understanding the relationship between HPV and cervical cancer is critical in protecting yourself from disease. I would like to share with you the following facts you should be aware of and a press release where I am quoted on the importance of HPV DNA testing.

Five Things Every Woman Should Know...And Three They Should Ask

1. Cervical cancer is highly preventable. Effective screening and early detection of pre-cancerous changes in the cervix are the keys to prevention.

2. Cervical cancer is shown to be caused by a virus called HPV or human papillomavirus. There are approximately 70 types of HPV, and 13 are known as "high risk" types which are associated with cervical cancer. HPV is most common in women under age 30 and almost always clears up on its own.

3. Having HPV does not mean you will develop cervical cancer. Most women will have HPV at some point, but very few will develop cervical cancer. When a woman's immune system is working normally, only HPV infection that is persistent over many years can lead to cervical cancer.

4. It can be helpful to know your HPV status. This can determine if you are at "lower risk," and assist your doctor in recommending how you should be screened.

5. HPV isn't reason to "blame." Your HPV status is not a reliable indicator of your sexual behavior - or your partner's.

Three question to ask your doctor during your next exam:

1. What do I need to know about HPV and cervical cancer?
2. Do you provide HPV testing as part of cervical cancer screening?
3. When or how often should I be screened for cervical cancer?

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New Study in Leading Medical Journal Shows HPV Test Is More Effective than Pap Smear for Cervical Cancer Screening

Study Published in The Lancet Also First to Provide Data for Managing Women Testing Positive for Virus that Causes Cervical Cancer

GAITHERSBURG, Md., Dec. 5 /PRNewswire-FirstCall/ -- A new study published in the Dec. 6 issue of The Lancet concludes that in women 30 and older, the HPV DNA test is more effective than the Pap smear alone

in identifying women with cervical cancer or its precursors. Investigators say the results of the study of 11,085 women should facilitate earlier treatment, while allowing others to avoid unnecessary, invasive follow-up procedures.

The research used Digene Corp.'s (NASDAQ:DIGE) DNAwithPap(TM) Test, which is the only FDA-approved test that detects the presence of the human papillomavirus (HPV) -- the primary cause of cervical cancer. In contrast, the Pap smear relies on visual examination of cervical cells for abnormal changes. In the study, investigators found that HPV testing has a sensitivity of 97.1 percent for identifying women with cervical cancer or precursor conditions, compared to 76.6 percent for the Pap smear. This finding, the authors state in the study report, helps explain why invasive cancer often develops after an apparently normal smear.

"Use of HPV testing in primary testing in addition to cytology (the Pap smear)...should prevent more cancers than the use of cytology alone," concluded Professor Jack Cuzick, PhD, lead investigator in the HART (HPV in Addition to Routine Testing) study and head of epidemiology for Cancer Research UK at Queen Mary's College in London. "The high rate of early detection in this study with HPV screening suggests the potential to save many more women's lives, while reducing medical costs."

While Digene's HPV DNA test is currently approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for use in conjunction with a Pap smear in women 30 and older, Prof. Cuzick and his co-investigators see an opportunity to further expand the test's role. "Rather than conducting the HPV test along with the Pap smear, it might be more cost effective to use HPV testing as the primary screening method, reserving the Pap for women who test positive," the authors state in *The Lancet*. "This is worth further study."

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 there is a risk of cancer. The findings of the new study also offer guidance for managing women who test positive for HPV, yet have normal Pap smears. According to the researchers, their findings suggest that it is safe to re- test these women annually - rather than subjecting them to colposcopy, a more invasive procedure for closely examining the cervix.

Worldwide, cervical cancer affects more than 400,000 women annually and, after breast cancer, is the second most common malignancy found in women. In the United States, an estimated 12,200 cases of cervical cancer are diagnosed annually, resulting in approximately 4,100 deaths each year.

"HPV DNA testing is helping to usher in a new era in cervical cancer prevention," adds 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 ensure cervical disease is not missed. In addition, women who are HPV-negative can be reassured, while safely reducing their need for invasive exams. This is very empowering for women."

Because the HPV DNA test is relatively new as a routine, adjunctive 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. More information on HPV testing can be found at <http://www.thehpvtest.com/>.

Talk to your doctor about the HPV test. Make this your New Year's resolution.

Best wishes for a safe and healthy holiday,
Marie Savard, M.D.

Give the Gift of Life-Saving Information

The holidays are rapidly approaching. Offer to be a health buddy for a friend or family member during the next year. Read my book, *How To Save Your Own Life: The Savard System for Managing - and Controlling - Your Health Care*, to learn much more about the value of being a health buddy (http://www.drsavard.com/system_book.htm).

My system (<http://www.drsavard.com/system.htm>) teaches you how to collect and store your own medical records and manage your own health care. Think about giving *The Savard Health Record: a six-step system for managing your health care* (http://www.drsavard.com/system_record.htm) to your family and friends this holiday season.

Special sale for this holiday season (available through the end of this year) when ordering three or more binders, "The Savard Health Record." \$8.95 each plus shipping and handling (retail price is \$24.95 each). To place your order please email eileen@drsavard.com or call toll free 877-SAVARDS (728-2737) requesting this holiday special!!

Marie Savard, MD is an internationally known internist, women's health expert and champion of patient empowerment. She is the founder of The Savard System, dedicated to teaching patients how to manage their own healthcare. She is the author of two highly acclaimed books, *How to Save Your Life: The Savard System for Managing-and Controlling-Your Health Care* (Warner Books, Inc. 2000) and *The Savard Health Record: a Six-Step System for Managing Your Health Care* (Time-Life, Inc. 2000).

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