

Cervical cancer in the Solomon Islands: a cross-sectional study of women presenting to the National Referral Hospital, Honiara, Solomon Islands

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BACKGROUND

In the Solomon Islands, a South Pacific country with a population of approximately 550,000, cervical cancer is the second most common malignancy in women and results in approximately 31 deaths per annum^{1,2}. There is no nationalised cervical cancer screening program in the country and little is known about the epidemiology³, demographics, health-seeking behaviour nor how women present with cervical cancer.

OBJECTIVES

Amongst women presenting to Honiara's National Referral Hospital, we sought to investigate:

1. Presenting symptoms and demographics of women with a new diagnosis of cervical cancer and
2. Barriers and attitudes to medical assessment and Pap smear examination

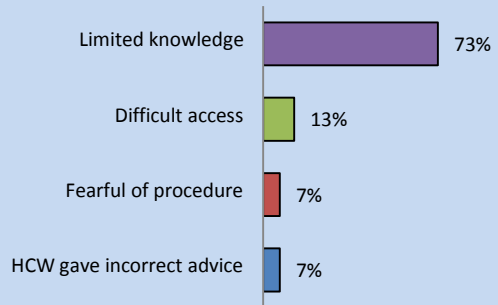
METHODS

A cross-sectional study was performed over a 24-month period at the National Referral Hospital. A convenience sample of 20 women with newly diagnosed cervical cancer were invited to complete a survey. Additional clinical information was obtained through medical record review. Ethics approval was obtained from the Solomon Islands Ministry of Health.

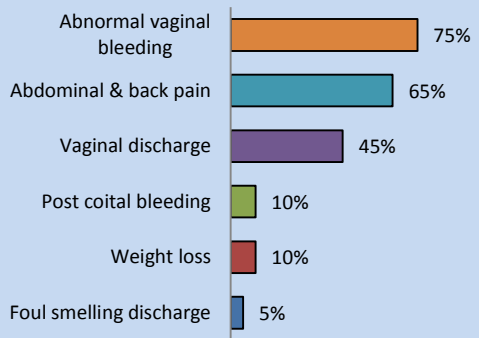
RESULTS

At the time of diagnosis, 6 women (30%) were aged less than 35. Of sixteen women with a documented cancer stage, 10 (62.5%) had stage three or four disease. The average duration of symptoms was 251 days (SD 158 days). The most common symptoms were abnormal bleeding (75%) and abdominal or back pain (65%). Ten (50%) of women knew about Pap smears, however only five (25%) women had previously undergone Pap smear testing. The reasons women didn't undergo a smear included limited access and knowledge. All women who had a smear had been lost to follow-up.

REASONS WHY WOMEN DIDN'T UNDERGO PAP SMEAR



PRESENTING SYMPTOMS



CONCLUSION

This study has highlighted that young women are presenting with advanced stage cervical cancer having endured many months of symptoms. Most women have limited knowledge regarding smears and those who had smears had inadequate follow-up. A national program of cervical screening along with education about early recognition of abnormal symptoms is urgently required.

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