

## **ABSTRACT**

### **Attitudes and Practices of Primary Health Care Practitioners Towards Screening Women Over 55 Years Old For Cervical Cancer**

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Cervical cancer is an important preventable problem among Caribbean women. Age-specific cervical cancer mortality rates indicate that among older women in the Americas, Caribbean women are more likely than other women in the sub-region to die of cervical cancer. This implies that screening programmes which are widely available in the Caribbean are not producing the desired decrease in mortality. As physician recommendation regarding screening is an important variable in the use of these services, the attitudes and practices of primary care practitioners (PCPs) towards screening women over 55 years old for cervical cancer were examined.

This study was carried out in the southeastern region of Jamaica. All public sector PCPs and a sample of private general practitioners proportionate to number in each parish, were invited to participate. The response rate was 84%, with a final sample of 122 persons (of a possible 146); 20 family nurse practitioners, 36 public medical officers and 66 private general practitioners.

Women attending curative clinics in three community health centres were conveniently selected to determine actual screening experience. A total of 110 women 55 years and older agreed to participate.

Over 80% of PCPS reported ordering annual Pap smears for female patients over 55 years old, with no difference in attitudes and practices towards screening women over 55 years old for cervical cancer, related to age, gender, profession, location or sector of employment. While patients reported a 73% lifetime history of being screened, only 28% had actually done a Pap smear in the previous year.

Explanations given by PCPs in the focus group discussion for these discrepancies between providers' reported practice and patient compliance include their failure to remember to actually order the test and the patient not doing the test when ordered. Patients identified provider recommendation as the main motivation for being screened, and ignorance about Pap smears and its importance at their age as the major reason they were not tested.

**Keywords:** Debbie Angelique Carrington; cervical cancer; Pap smears; women over 55 years; attitudes; practices; primary healthcare practitioners.