



## **SURVEY SHOWS MOST WOMEN CAN'T SEPARATE FACT FROM FICTION WHEN IT COMES TO CERVICAL CANCER PREVENTION**

### ***National Association of Nurse Practitioners in Women's Health (NPWH) Encourages Women to Get Informed and Ask for Comprehensive Screening***

**Washington, D.C., Feb. 20, 2008** – Despite growing awareness of HPV (human papillomavirus), the primary cause of cervical cancer, a new survey released by the National Association of Nurse Practitioners in Women's Health (NPWH) found that many women remain in the dark about what it takes to prevent the disease. Despite the fact that there is now a vaccine that can prevent infection with the most common types of HPV and a test that identifies who is infected, most of the 1,000 women surveyed often confused myth with fact when quizzed about cervical cancer prevention.

"One of the myths the survey revealed was that women think they're out of the woods if they've been in a long-term relationship. In fact, however, HPV can stay in the body for many years. It only takes one relationship for an infection to take hold," says Susan Wysocki, NP, president and CEO of NPWH. "Another myth revealed by the survey is that women don't think they need the HPV test if they've had normal Pap smears all their lives. However, the Pap isn't foolproof. It's still possible to suddenly discover you have invasive cancer despite a history of normal Paps. Getting the HPV test along with your Pap if you're over 30 – when you are most at risk -- provides maximum peace of mind."

#### **Women Most at Risk are Least Aware**

According to the survey, women older than 30, who are most at risk of developing cervical cancer, are half as likely as their younger counterparts to recall speaking to their doctors or nurses about HPV and its link to cervical cancer. They also are less knowledgeable about the virus.

- Although 90 percent of women 30 and older considered themselves somewhat or very familiar with the preventive tests they need, 58 percent had not heard of the HPV test, and 86 percent did not recall their doctors or nurses ever talking to them about the test.
- Yet, the older a woman is, the more confident she is that her doctor or nurse is giving her all of the preventive tests she needs.

#### **Other major findings of the survey are:**

- More than half of women surveyed did not know that cervical cancer is preventable.
- Nearly one-third erroneously believed the HPV test isn't necessary if a woman isn't currently sexually active, or is in a long-term, monogamous relationship.
- Over one-third of the women surveyed did not know that insurance usually covers HPV testing.
- More than a quarter of women believed the Pap is accurate enough to find abnormal cells before they become cancerous, especially if a liquid-based Pap is used. Yet one study has found that a third of cervical cancers occur in women whose Paps appeared normal.<sup>1</sup>

Thirty-seven-year-old Jodi McKinney, a mother of five and wife of 18 years, is an example. She always made time for an annual Pap smear, which had always come back negative. In 2007, her physician, Dr. Mamie Bowers, began offering her patients over the age of 30 the HPV test along with a Pap, as an extra precaution. Although her Pap was normal as usual, the HPV test indicated that she had a high-risk type of the virus. Later, another exam confirmed she had pre-cancerous cervical disease. Fortunately, the abnormal cells were able to be removed without requiring a hysterectomy – and *before* they became cancer.

"I feel extremely lucky that I was able to catch my cervical disease at such an early stage, and that I didn't have to go through any major surgeries or other treatments. I was able to move on with life and my family," McKinney recalls. "I feel so fortunate that my doctor gave me the HPV test along with my Pap. Without that extra precaution, I probably wouldn't have found out about my condition until cancer had already developed."

### **Survey Methodology**

An online, quantitative survey, fielded by Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates (PSB), was conducted among 1,000 women age 20 and older between Dec. 20, 2007, and Jan. 6, 2008. The survey assessed women's evolving awareness and knowledge about cervical cancer, HPV and preventive medicine.

### **About HPV and Cervical Cancer**

The American Cancer Society estimates that in 2007, about 11,500 women in the United States developed cervical cancer and about 3,650 died from the disease. Worldwide, cervical cancer is the second-most-common type of cancer that strikes women — behind only breast cancer. Its cause, HPV, is a very common virus, infecting approximately 80 percent of all women at some point in their lifetimes. In the majority of women, the virus goes away or is suppressed by the body before it causes any problems. A Pap smear can identify cells that have become abnormal due to HPV, while HPV testing detects the presence of the virus itself. The FDA has approved routine HPV testing for women age 30 and older — the group most likely to have persistent infections and most at risk of developing cervical cancer. In addition, the first HPV vaccine has been approved for girls and young women age 9-26, and is expected to greatly reduce the number of cervical cancers. However, the vaccine does not provide complete protection. Regular screening with a Pap and — for women age 30 and older -- the HPV test should be a lifelong habit.

### **About the National Association of Nurse Practitioners in Women's Health (NPWH)**

The National Association of Nurse Practitioners in Women's Health was founded in 1980. NPWH's mission is to assure the provision of quality healthcare to women of all ages by nurse practitioners. NPWH defines quality health care to be inclusive of an individual's physical, emotional and spiritual needs. To learn more about NPWH, visit [www.npwh.org](http://www.npwh.org)

***To learn more about cervical cancer prevention, visit [www.theHPVtest.com](http://www.theHPVtest.com).***

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<sup>1</sup> J. Cuzick, G. Ronco, N. Segnan, P. Giorgio-Rossi et al, "Human Papilloma Testing and Liquid-Based Cytology: Results at Recruitment From the New Technologies for Cervical Cancer Randomized Controlled Trial." *The Journal of the National Cancer Institute* 2006; 98: 765-74.