

## **The Dublin Well Woman Centres / Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland HPV (Human Papilloma Virus) Prevalence Study**

In partnership with the royal college of Surgeons in Ireland (R.C.S.I.) and starting October 2004, Well Woman has been conducting research on a sample of 1,000 women to establish prevalence rates for HPV amongst women in Ireland.

### **The Science – What is HPV?**

Over 80 Irish women die each year for cervical cancer. This is almost entirely a treatable condition, if it is picked up in the pre-malignant, pre-cancerous stage. HPV – Human Papilloma Virus – can be a contributory factor.

Research in other countries has identified the types of HPV that can cause cervical cancer, and testing for HPV has been shown to be an accurate indicator of whether or not a woman is at high risk of developing cervical cancer.

More than 100 types of HPV have been identified, with Type 6 and Type 11 making up about 85% of cases in the UK. Both of these Types are benign with a low risk of causing cervical cancer.

There are no Irish figures for HPV prevalence, and we don't know if Irish figures are similar to the UK.

High risk HPV's such as Type 16 and Type 18 are more likely to cause cervical cell changes but even then, in the majority of cases, the virus clears spontaneously. HPV is very common in young women but again tends to clear spontaneously.

HPV testing is currently unavailable in Ireland, yet this could be easily done, as the test is performed on the cervical smear sample, and would therefore cause no extra discomfort or inconvenience to women.

In the future HPV testing may be added to routine analysis of smear tests to identify the women most at risk. Women with minor cell changes on their smear but who were negative for the high-risk HPV types would not require the same level of follow-up. This would reduce the number of women requiring repeat smear test and colposcopy referrals, and ultimately might take some pressure off the hospitals.

### **How is the research being done?**

Starting October 2004, one thousand Well Woman patients across our three clinics who presented for a cervical smear were asked to give their consent to have their smear sample analysed for HPV.

From the patient's perspective, the R.C.S.I. analysed the cervical smear in the usual way and Well Woman received the usual smear report in the normal time frame, which was then sent to the patient.

Well Woman did not receive individual HPV results as this data was analysed anonymously.

At present, there will be no change to Well Woman's protocol as referral for colposcopy, and we will continue to recommend screen intervals and follow-up in line with current best practice.

Well Woman expects to have preliminary results in Summer 2006 and will post the data on its website.

**To our Patients:**

By consenting to take part in Well Woman's HPV Prevalence Study, you helped us to gather important information that may:

- Lead to improvements in the delivery of cervical screening to women in Ireland,
- Help us identify those women most at risk of going on to develop cervical cancer (with a view to earlier intervention and treatment),
- Help us reduce the pressure on hospital-based gynaecology clinics.

**Well Woman Centre  
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