

Intervention Model for Cervical Cancer Screening

Globally, cervical cancer is a major public health concern. Its frequency is second only to breast cancer among female neoplasias and it is the fifth-most frequent cause of cancer worldwide. This disease is a priority in public health because it can be prevented by routine gynecological exams where a Pap smear (cytology test) is performed. The Pap smear, one of the most effective and efficient tests available for oncological screening, is known for its major contribution to the remarkable decrease in cervical cancer incidence and mortality.

Among European countries, Romania has the highest cervical cancer incidence and mortality, yet it lacks a coherent national level screening program. Unfortunately, cervical cancer affects mainly young, sexually active women, and more than 47% of the women diagnosed in 2003 were between the ages of 40-54. Between 2000 and 2003, 30,000 years of life were lost in Romania as a result of deaths due to cervical cancer (data source: National Register of Cancer).

Strategic approach

Because screening is the best method for early detection of cervical cancer, JSI Romania and the Romanian Cancer Society, in partnership with I. Chiricuța Oncology Institute from Cluj-Napoca, initiated and implemented an intervention model in order to increase disadvantaged women's access to information, education, and Pap smears. The program began in 2003 and targeted women from rural areas between the ages of 25 and 65 although it did not exclude disadvantaged women from urban areas. Clients were served regardless of ethnicity or religious orientation. The US Government, through the US Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Romanian Family Health Initiative (RFHI) financed the project, and I. Chiricuța Oncology Institute covered part of the costs.

Key activities

- ❖ Informed and educated the target population about participation in cervical screening program as well as how to perform self breast examinations.
- ❖ Provided Pap tests for early diagnosis of cervical cancer, taught self-exams for early diagnosis of breast cancer and provided free mammograms when necessary.
- ❖ Created common standards and criteria based on cervical cancer prevention programs and EU standards at a consensus conference attended by 90 gynecologists, oncologists, cytologists and family doctors from Cluj.
- ❖ Implemented trainings for family doctors on the collection of tissue samples and breast examinations.
- ❖ Built partnerships (local initiative groups) with local authorities and community resources.
- ❖ Disseminated information and expertise gained during the implementation of the pilot model and the complete screening program at a conference in Cluj.

Results

- ❖ Gave information on the importance and methods of early diagnosis of cervical and breast cancer to more than 4,000 women, from 109 villages from the counties of Cluj, Sălaj, Bistrița and Satu Mare.
- ❖ Provided Pap smears, followed by individual counseling, to more than 13,000 women from 115 villages and 9 towns in program-participating counties. 91% of these women had never had a Pap smear prior to this initiative; 83% of the women received breast examinations from a physician.
- ❖ Trained 101 family doctors from Cluj and Satu Mare counties. Many of those trained became involved with the prevention program, which included theoretical and practical sessions on early diagnosis of cervical and breast cancers.
- ❖ Reached consensus on clinical standards for cervical cancer screening in Cluj and created practical guidelines for specialists in the field.
- ❖ Improved access to services in isolated areas through a van equipped with medical supplies and specialized staff.
- ❖ Fostered local sustainability by creating groups of key community members who mobilized local resources to increase the effects of information and education messages on the target population.
- ❖ Created a model of partnership among public institutions involved in scientific and methodological forums.