



WOMEN'S HEALTH

Prevention Key To Fighting Women's Cancers

(NAPSA)—Learning more about the value of regular check-ups, education and the early detection of gynecologic cancers may help women live longer and healthier lives.

More than 80,000 women in this country are diagnosed with a gynecologic cancer—ovarian, uterine, cervical, vulvar, vaginal or tubal—affecting approximately 10 women every hour.

Women owe it to themselves and their loved ones to visit the doctor annually, take preventative measures and discuss symptoms with the doctor. However, misconceptions, myths and difficult-to-recognize symptoms can cause women to miss opportunities for early diagnosis. Here are three of the most common myths women should understand:

Myth #1: Pap smears screen for all types of gynecologic cancers including ovarian, uterine and cervical cancer.

Fact: Pap smears, which should be part of every woman's regular wellness routine, only test for cancer of the cervix, one of six types of gynecologic cancer. No other cancer can be reliably detected using this method. Also, women should know that a Pap smear is designed to test healthy women. If a woman has other symptoms, such as abnormal bleeding, she should talk to her doctor because other tests may be necessary.

Myth #2: Only post-menopausal women are at risk for developing a gynecologic cancer.

Fact: Gynecologic cancers do not discriminate—women of all ages are at risk. Peak cancer rates for cervical cancer occur for women in their 40s, while ovarian and uterine cancer rates peak for women in their 60s and 70s. Additionally, gynecologic cancers affecting the reproductive organs can occur at any age.

Myth #3: Women can gauge their risk of ovarian cancer by learning about their mother's family history.

Fact: It is important for women



to learn about their maternal and paternal family histories of breast, ovarian, uterine, colon and prostate cancers. However, 90 percent of ovarian cancers occur in women without a recognized family history of cancer. All women should know the symptoms of ovarian cancer and seek appropriate care from a gynecologic specialist if symptoms persist.

Gynecologic oncologists, physicians with specialized training to treat cancers of the female reproductive tract, advise women with the following symptoms to seek medical attention as soon as possible:

- Frequent urination
- A change in bowel or bladder habits
- A sore that does not heal
- Unusual vaginal bleeding or discharge
- A thickening or lump that either causes pain or can be seen or felt
- Persistent indigestion or abdominal bloating
- Pain in the pelvic area
- Excessive fatigue

For free or additional information, call the Gynecologic Cancer Foundation at 1-800-444-4441 or log onto The Women's Cancer Network at www.wcn.org, to take a free, confidential risk assessment test. The site contains valuable resources and information for women who are at risk for or have been diagnosed with gynecologic and breast cancer.