

## **WOMEN NOT GETTING FOLLOW-UP CARE FOLLOWING ABNORMAL PAP SMEARS**

**Toronto, ON (June 1, 2011, 4 p.m.)** – In the first Canadian study of its kind, researchers at the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences and Sunnybrook’s Odette Cancer Centre have found that at least 26 per cent of women across the country, who have abnormal Pap test results, are not receiving proper follow-up care.

Published in the June issue of the journal, *Gynecologic Oncology*, the study included 43,792 women who had a first-time, abnormal Pap smear. The women were followed for a period of up to two-years to determine medical or surgical management of their abnormal test results.

Findings show that patients with abnormal Pap smear results waited 13 to 24 weeks for referral for a more thorough test to determine whether or not cancer was present. The researchers found the average time to diagnosis of an underlying cervical cancer was between 3 to 26 weeks. Unfortunately, 26 per cent of patients had no follow-up referral within two years of an abnormal Pap smear.

“What is clear from this study is that we need to develop an effective pathway for follow-up care for patients who have abnormal Pap test results,” said Dr. Rachel Kupets, lead clinical investigator and surgical oncologist at Sunnybrook’s Odette Cancer Centre Gynaecology Cancer Care team. “The goal of screening is not only to catch serious pre-cancerous changes on the cervix, it is also meant to detect cervical cancers in early stages to ensure patients have the best results possible from their treatment. If we are going to put efforts into screening we need to ensure there is a system in place to care for patients from the discovery of an abnormality through to diagnosis, treatment and recovery.”

There were a number of recommendations in the study to improve the system of care for patients who have abnormal results including developing consistent language for pathology reports, establishing guidelines for managing women with concerning results, expedited appointments for more investigative tests, and wide-spread screening programs that are integrated and connected to other levels of care.

“I think it would be worthwhile for health authorities across the country to take a closer look at their screening programs to ensure people are not falling through the cracks,” said Dr. Kupets, who is also an assistant professor of surgery at the University of Toronto. “We know we can save lives when we detect cancers but if there is a lack of adequate follow-up then we are only fighting half of the battle.”

According to Statistics Canada, about 1,400 new cases of cervical cancer are diagnosed each year and there are approximately 400 deaths associated with the disease. Incidence rates begin to rise sharply around 40 years of age. The highest incidence and mortality rates occur in women over 65 years of age. Estimates predict that regular Pap smear testing and proper follow-up care can prevent up to 90 per cent of cervical cancers.