

'I'm here for my women's check up': health promotion in the context of cervical screening

Genevieve Dally

Family Planning and Welfare, NT

Australia celebrates its successful cervical screening program with significantly low incidences of morbidity and mortality associated with cervical cancer. Health promotion campaigns that align with this biennial program are heralded, globally, as measures of effective recruitment and retention into a program with well understood health benefits. In rural and remote Australia, Cervical screening is colloquially known as a 'women's check up' and occurs within a context of opportunistic screening, health assessment and education. This paper aims to explore what really goes on when a woman attends for her 'women's check up' and the implications for a future screening program that proposes five yearly intervals between testing.

A clinical audit was undertaken to determine the likelihood of additional women's health issues being addressed as part of a Cervical screening consultation. Data was collected from a Darwin sexual and reproductive health service from the month of June 2014, Electronic software, Medical Director and DME client were used to extract data and verify demographics, consultation details and reason for attendance. Issues that were earmarked as being regularly identified included breast health, STI screening, contraception management of menstrual symptoms, incontinence, fertility, pregnancy options and lifestyle issues.

Of the sixty-eight consultations that took place in June 2014, the vast majority involved discussion, education, advice or referral pertaining to one or more additional women's health issue. This occurred despite the reason for attendance given as Cervical screening only. The clinical audit clearly demonstrated that women present for a 'check-up' as a result of raised awareness about cervical screening but are then given opportunity to manage other issues and conditions that could have significant negative health repercussions if not addressed efficiently.

In a landscape of advanced technology, HPV vaccination programs and sound evidence to support changes to Cervical screening intervals, challenges exist for health practitioners in addressing women's health needs in a timely and acceptable manner. Health promotion campaigns will need to normalise health seeking behaviour and support women to access services outside of established recommendations.