



February 2008

Subject: Cytotechnology Schools Under Threat

We the undersigned professional societies wish to inform educators and laboratory administrators of a coming crisis in healthcare. Many schools of laboratory allied health, and cytotechnology in particular, are under threat. We are very concerned that precipitous action may reverse hard won gains in public health.

A system that has saved many lives is at risk of being destroyed. The Pap test achieved a 70% decrease in cervical cancer and a 90% decrease in the death rate since screening programs began in the late nineteen forties. Dr. Papanicolaou created a partnership between pathologists and a laboratory specialty, the cytotechnologist, to defeat a scourge that claimed tens of thousands of lives annually. The terminal cervical cancer ward in every hospital was largely eradicated. Dismantling cytotechnology programs is, at the very least premature, and will endanger patient health.

Sensational media sources have wrongly touted the end of the Pap test due to the advent of the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) Vaccine. Administrators have noted this information and acted. Funding for schools has been redirected and facilities have closed, or told they will be terminated at the end of the academic year. In reality, local HPV vaccination programs have hardly begun and currently no national vaccination program exists. Vaccinations will be directed toward a naive population that has not had exposure to HPV. We know that older individuals will not receive equal protection even if it is deemed reasonable to vaccinate them. Once a national program begins, it will be at least half a generation before the vaccinated individuals arrive at the normal ages for cervical cancer surveillance. Additionally, vaccines do not cover the entire spectrum of high risk HPV types.

These scientific facts indicate that we STILL need the capacity to perform Pap tests and will need capacity as we go into the foreseeable future. Recent publications have estimated that there may be a 50% decrease in the number of Pap tests *in a decade* due to HPV vaccines, HPV testing and altered testing protocols, but this is only a 50% decrease. In the United States alone we perform over 60 million Pap tests annually. Even at a 50% reduction, 30 million tests is still a considerable volume. Simply due to the aging of our laboratory staff, we will easily lose more than half our current testing capacity unless we maintain the cytotechnologist pool through our established excellent training programs.

It is an enormous effort to maintain an accredited program, but an even more daunting task is to re-open a closed program or to create a program de-novo. Our average cytotechnologist is now approximately 50 years old.

Retirements and an ever-decreasing number of schools are setting the stage for a crisis. It would truly be a paradox if all the recent advances caused an increase in cervical cancer or an escalating Pap test cost because of lack of cytotechnology professionals. Furthermore, our aging population is going to need additional cytologic services for the diagnosis and monitoring of cancer at sites other than the uterine cervix, and there may be no one to help deliver those services.

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AMERICAN SOCIETY OF CYTOPATHOLOGY

We know that budgets are always under siege, and administrators are under constant pressure to improve their bottom line; however, we may find ourselves in a worse situation if we succumb to short-term fiscal remedies. We are imploring administrators and public officials capable of acting to pay attention to this looming crisis for the sake of the public and themselves.

Sincerely,

American Society of Cytopathology
American Society for Clinical Pathology
The College of American Pathologists
United States and Canadian Academy of Pathologists
American Society for Cytotechnologists
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
Papanicolaou Society of Cytopathology
Texas Society of Pathologists
American Society for Reproductive Medicine
Clinical Laboratory Management Association
Association of Public Health Laboratories