

Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health
Volume 37, Number 2, June 2005

Poor Knowledge Regarding the Pap Test Among Low-Income Women Undergoing Routine Screening

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CONTEXT: Many women undergoing cervical cancer screening lack appropriate understanding of the Pap test. It is important to evaluate knowledge and informational needs about Pap testing among groups who may have difficulty accessing care or a relatively low likelihood of obtaining follow-up for an abnormal result, such as minority and low-income women.

METHODS: A sample of 338 women undergoing cervical screening at two clinics in Texas completed a questionnaire measuring their knowledge of Pap testing and asking what specific information they would like to know about the test. Group comparisons and qualitative analyses were conducted.

RESULTS: Women correctly answered an average of 8.7 out of 20 questions; the range was 0–17. Mean scores were higher among white women (10.2) than among blacks (8.4) and Hispanics (7.4), among women with more than a high school education than among their less educated counterparts (10.0 vs. 7.9) and among women with an annual household income of at least \$10,000 than among those with a lower income (9.3 vs. 8.4). Knowledge scores did not differ according to Pap history. Open-ended questioning identified a need for information on the purpose of the test, exam procedures, abnormal test results and prognosis.

CONCLUSIONS: Minority women and those of low socioeconomic status had poor understanding of Pap testing. Identifying misunderstandings in this vulnerable population and improving patient education on the most basic aspects of Pap testing may increase adherence to follow-up when abnormalities are detected.

Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health, 2005, 37(2):78–84

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DOI:10.1363/3707805

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