

GHIA Foundation Supports Cervical Cancer HPV Screening at the Benson Hospital, Paynesville-LIBERIA

Jan 8 – Jan 30, 2025

Introduction

The purpose of this cervical cancer HPV screening initiative was to determine the prevalence of HPV among women aged 30 years and above in Paynesville, Liberia. HPV types 16, 18 and 45 are highly implicated in causing cervical cancer. The study also aimed to assess the awareness of HPV and identify knowledge gaps among women.

Cervical cancer has surpassed Breast Cancer as the number one most prevalent Female Cancer in Liberia.

Special acknowledgment goes to – Dr Charles Maas, the COO of the Global Health Innovations and Action Foundation (GHIA Foundation)/US for providing the donation of USD 10,000 to fund the Study. Deep appreciation goes to Dr. Ann Marie Beddoe of the Women Global Cancer Initiative, New York and the Technical Adviser on Cancer Prevention and Control, Ministry of Health, Liberia for her technical advice and for facilitating the procurement of the Laboratory supplies. We would like to thank the Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD) Division of the Ministry of Health, especially the Cancer Coordinator Florence Nyanque for the support provided.

Methodology: The sample was taken from Paynesville suburb of Monrovia and its surrounding communities following a week of Radio announcements offering free Cervical Cancer screening, commonly referred to as “womb cancer in local Liberian English. Three radio stations were used for the announcements: The Liberia Broadcasting System, Truth FM and the ELWA Radio. The screening took place at Benson Hospital over a period of three weeks.

The women screened were of age 30 years or above.

Sample Collection: The women who volunteered to be screened completed an HPV Screening Survey form on their demography, Telephone numbers, their previous history of screening test and knowledge about cervical cancer. The samples collection was done by nurses from the Benson Hospital. Three nurses were trained for the sample collection processes using a brush inserted to wipe around the cervix five times, removed and inserted in the collection jar procured for that purpose. One jar was used per woman with only her number written on the jar. The Lab Coordinator transported the samples to the John F. Kennedy Medical Center (JFK) pathology lab daily, where they were prepared in a special solution and analyzed using the calibrated GeneXpert machine.

The results were generated from the GeneXpert machine and a copy was made available per client. The results were also manually entered into the ledger book containing the client’s Name, their telephone number and Screening Number. After

the total results came out from the Pathology Lab /JFK Medical Center, the women were called to inform them about their results.

Key Findings- Out of the 295 women screened, 65 were positive for HPV 16, 18 or 45, giving us 22%. This is a high positive rate in the Paynesville Community and could be added to other small studies to project what may be the situation in the general population. There was very low awareness that HPV causes cervical cancer among the women.

The prevalence of HPV knowledge was about 10%, with less than 5% of study participants linking HPV to cervical cancer.

Total number of Women screened for HPV = 295

The Total Number of HPV Positive = 65 (22% of those screened)

The Total number of Negatives = 218

Invalid cases = 12

Clinical Outcomes

- **Screening results:** HPV-negative 218 vs. HPV-positive - 22% All the women screened were called to inform them about their results.
- **Referrals:** All the Positive cases were referred to the Gyn- oncologist at the Maternity Center, JFK Medical Center, Monrovia-Liberia. The positive cases were treated at the JFK Medical Center but due to the high cost of the treatment, they may not be able to complete their treatment.

Simple **analysis** gave a compelling high HPV positive result of 22%

- **Demographic disparities:**
- All participants demonstrated low awareness of HPV and cervical cancer. Less than 10% had knowledge of the link between HPV and cervical cancer.

Recommendations

- 1) **Vaccination:** Expand HPV vaccination outreach to high-risk groups. Currently, the HPV vaccine is included in Liberia's routine immunization program for girls aged 9 to 13, aimed at preventing cervical cancer.
- 2) **Annual Screening campaigns:** Screening should be conducted annually at the Benson Hospital and other Health facilities as funding allows.

- 3) **Massive Education/Awareness Activities:** Increase HPV and cervical cancer awareness should be done through the mass media, TV Radio and print media using English and local languages. IEC and health promotion talks should be given to female patients in all Health facilities on a sustained basis.
- 4) **Continuity of Care:** Women who tested positive and were referred to the maternity Center at JFK Teaching Hospital require follow-up care and management. However, limited funding poses a major challenge to ensuring continuity of care.