

## **SAMPLE OP-ED**

### **HEEDING THE CALL TO END CERVICAL CANCER**

**[Word Count: 519]**

At the recent Global Summit of Women, held in Hanoi, Vietnam, a powerful alliance of women leaders issued a call for governments around the world to reduce death rates from cervical cancer. With [number] new cases of cervical cancer diagnosed in [country] each year, our government must heed this call.

No woman should suffer or die from this highly preventable disease. No other cancer has such a clearly understood cause, as well as available technologies to help prevent it. Our government must ensure that [nationality] women are educated about cervical cancer prevention and that the most up-to-date tools to fight this disease – such as HPV testing and vaccination -- are available and accessible to all age-appropriate girls and women.

Cervical cancer is the second-most-common cancer in women worldwide. Each year, approximately 500,000 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer and an estimated 250,000 die of the disease, according to the World Health Organization. Cervical cancer is especially devastating because it typically strikes women while they are relatively young.

Experts now agree that the primary cause of cervical cancer is a virus – the human papillomavirus (HPV). HPV is extremely common; most sexually active people will be infected with it at some point in their lives. It may remain dormant for months or even many years, and usually does not cause harm or noticeable symptoms. Only when HPV infection persists, usually for several years, can it potentially lead to cervical disease or cancer.

Pap tests, which look for signs of abnormal cells caused by HPV, have gone a long way towards reducing cervical cancer rates in developed countries. They are not perfect, however. Pap tests are subjective and can miss cervical disease until it becomes advanced cancer. This is especially a problem when women are not screened regularly.

A newer, molecular test for HPV has been shown to dramatically improve the ability to identify women at risk of developing this deadly disease. Studies have shown that the HPV test is 86 percent to 97 percent effective in identifying women with pre-cancer or cancer and, when used in combination with a Pap test, is nearly 100 percent effective. HPV testing is now included in cervical cancer screening guidelines of leading global medical organizations.

HPV vaccines are also now available and have been found to be 100 percent effective at preventing infection with the two types of HPV that cause 70 percent of all cervical cancers. The HPV vaccines are most effective when administered to girls and young women who have not been exposed to the targeted types of HPV. Experts agree that a combination of screening and HPV vaccination is the best approach to reducing cervical cancer rates worldwide.

Having advanced preventive techniques, however, is only the first step in ending cervical cancer. Every age-appropriate woman and girl must be informed about the need for screening and vaccination, and have access to the most current technologies. Our government can ensure that these objectives are met. [IF POSSIBLE, INCLUDE SPECIFIC ITEMS OF ACTION FOR YOUR COUNTRY] We have a powerful opportunity to leave an incredible legacy to our daughters – a world that is free from cervical cancer. Our elected leaders must heed this call.