

Abstract

Background: The burden of uterine cervical cancer – accounting for the 8% of the total cancer deaths among female worldwide – has been definitely reduced by 70% in western countries thanks to effective cytology based screening programs. Now the 85% of its weight is on developing countries. Cervical Cancer represents the most frequent cancer in Swaziland, with an age standardized incidence rate (ASR) of 50/100'000 person years.

Objectives: To evaluate the feasibility and affordability of cytological screening for cervical cancer in Swaziland, with the support of literature evidence and of an assessment in the field.

Methods: A comprehensive literature research on cervical cancer screening as used in Sub-Saharan Africa was carried out, placing particular attention on South Africa. In addition data from 50 Pap tests performed as opportunistic screening in a primary health care (PHC) clinic in rural Swaziland were retrospectively analyzed.

Conclusion: The implementation of cytology based screening programs failed in Sub-Saharan Africa due to the lack of financial resources, reliable laboratories and skilled providers. Furthermore financial barriers to hospital based diagnosis and treatment contributed to low program coverage. South Africa met the same insurmountable constraints though it is defined as a low-middle income country. Implementation of cytology doesn't look either feasible nor affordable in Swaziland, despite though the small geographical dimension and target population. New see and treat approaches can reduce the need for infrastructures and specialized health providers and can strengthen the link between screening and treatment. Irrespective of adopted strategy, an effective screening program should be organized at the central level because complex and coordinated interventions are needed for a screening program to be effective: mass health education and information, providers' training, accessible screening and treatment services, adequate referral and quality assurance systems.