

Call for equal access to cervical cancer treatment for all women and girls

The World Medical Association and the Medical Women's International Association as called for a comprehensive prevention strategy for reducing the threat of cervical cancer.

In a joint statement to mark International Women's Day on Saturday, March 8, the two organisations demand action for women and girls around the world to have equal access to the highest quality prevention and treatment options for cervical cancer and say that such a strategy should include screening and vaccination.

Dr. Shelley Ross, Secretary-General of the Medical Women's International Association, said: "Cervical cancer is the second most common cancer among women. But it is now preventable due to the availability of a vaccine against human papillomavirus (HPV)".

She said that every year cervical cancer affected 500,000 women and took the lives of 250,000 women worldwide. Women in poor countries were the most affected, with 80% of the deaths from cervical cancer due to extremely limited screening and treatment availability.

Dr. Ross added: "When reflecting back on major advances in women's health in years to come, HPV vaccine will be listed one of the major breakthroughs. It is urgent that governments across the world start prioritising cervical cancer with sustainable political and financial commitments. Not doing so means losing lives. It means also not granting to women and girls in poor countries the right to equal access to life-saving technologies".

Four of the common types of HPV could be prevented through vaccination although there was currently no treatment available that could cure an HPV infection. HPV vaccine therefore had the potential to substantially reduce the prevalence cervical cancer, although not to eradicate it.

Dr. Jon Snaedal, President of the WMA, said "Medical associations have a key role to play in this strategy in making information on HPV vaccine available to physicians and to encourage physicians to alert their patients on this innovation".

"Cost must not be a barrier to making the vaccine available to women and girls worldwide. We are calling for a strong mobilisation of decision-makers, international organisations, international donor community and development partners, as well as medical associations, civil society and industry to act now for a change, to stop cervical cancer".

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