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Patients' reactions to further evaluation of abnormal cytological smear tests

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Cervical Cancer

- Cervical cancer is the 7th most common cause of cancer mortality
 - 233 000 women in the world die from the disease each year (Parkin et al., 2001)
 - Cervical cancer is the 9th most common cancer in Irish women
 - Annually, approx. 1000 new cases of CIN and 264 new cases of invasive cervical cancer
 - Each year, approx. 107 women die from the disease in Ireland (Campo et al., 2004)
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Screening For Cervical Cancer

- Cervical cancer is largely preventable
 - Countries with screening programmes have documented declining incidence and mortality rates of cervical cancer (Levi et al., 2000)
 - In Ireland, mortality rates increased during the 1980s and 1990s (Comber & Gavin, 2004)
 - CervicalCheck offers free smears to women aged 25-60 years
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Patient Experiences of Screening

- Abnormal test results may lead to high levels of anxiety and psychosexual distress and fear of cancer

 - Anxiety may influence adherence rates
 - Nonadherence between 10-40% (e.g., Khanna & Phillips, 2001)

 - Colposcopy also associated with high levels of anxiety (e.g., Bekkers et al., 2002; Walsh et al., 2004)
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Methods

- 200 women (age 20-60) previous colposcopy in previous 6-month period
 - Postal questionnaire, with cover letter and stamped addressed envelope (SAE)
 - Reminder questionnaire plus SAE sent after 2 weeks

 - Questionnaire assessed colposcopy-related anxiety, distress, pain; satisfaction with information, desire for information.
 - Also assessed helpfulness of suggested interventions for use during colposcopy
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Results

- 197 women available for assessment
 - 151 questionnaires returned
 - Response rate 77%

 - Demographics:
 - Mean age of respondents: 33.30 (SD = 6.89)
 - 49% married/living as married, 44% single
 - 68% Third level education, 23% Second level education
 - 49% no children, 45% between 1-3 children
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Reactions To Colposcopy

- 87% of sample reported moderate anxiety
 - 28% reported extreme anxiety

 - Reported concerns included
 - Colposcopy outcome (70%)
 - Fear of cancer (65%)
 - The cause of the abnormal smear test (50%)
 - Colposcopy painful (40%)
 - Colposcopy procedure itself (33%)
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Patient Concerns

- Significantly greater anxiety in women who reported
 - ❑ fear of cancer, $t(149) = 6.81, p < .001$
 - ❑ concern about the colposcopy procedure, $t(149) = 3.19, p < .002$
 - ❑ concern about embarrassment $t(149) = 3.97, p < .011,$
 - ❑ concern about fertility $t(149) = 2.62, p < .01$

Compared to women not reporting these concerns

Experience of Colposcopy

- Pain
 - 30% did not find it painful, 42% found it somewhat painful, and 28% found it very painful
 - Discomfort
 - 52% reported great discomfort, 34% moderate discomfort, 14% reported no discomfort
 - Unpleasantness
 - 43% found it very unpleasant, 36% found it moderately unpleasant, 21% did not find it unpleasant
 - Embarrassment
 - 38% found it very embarrassing, 32% found it somewhat embarrassing, and 30% did not find it embarrassing
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Colposcopy Anxiety

- Anxious patients reported
 - higher levels of pain $\chi^2 (2) = 7.78, p = .020$
 - Greater discomfort $\chi^2 (2) = 18.75, p = .001$
 - Greater unpleasantness $\chi^2 (2) = 12.43, p = .010$
 - Higher levels of embarrassment $\chi^2 (2) = 8.17, p = .017$

Than non-anxious patients during colposcopy

Experience of Treatment

- 46% of respondents reported treatment for CIN
 - Pain
 - 49% found it very painful, 34% found it somewhat painful, 17% found it not painful
 - Discomfort
 - 62% reported high discomfort, 27% reported moderate discomfort, 11% reported no discomfort
 - Unpleasantness
 - 58% found it very unpleasant, 30% found it somewhat unpleasant, 12% did not find it unpleasant
 - Embarrassment
 - 34% very embarrassing, 37% somewhat, 29% not embarrassing
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Satisfaction with Information

- 128 (85%) reported receiving the pre-colposcopy information leaflet
 - 63% reported finding it very helpful, 35% found it moderately helpful
 - 75% reported being very satisfied with information received on the clinic day, 23% moderately satisfied, and 2% not very satisfied
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Helpfulness of Suggested Interventions

- Patients rated on a 7-point scale how helpful they considered each of the following to be
 - Watching a DVD, listening to music, distraction, watching the colposcopy screen, more information, nurse reassurance
 - Nurse reassurance highest rated, followed by more information, distraction, watching colposcopy screen, listening to music, watching a DVD
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Discussion

- In general, women have low levels of knowledge about cervical screening
 - ❑ 65% of women thought they had cancer on receipt of abnormal smear result
 - ❑ 78% of women believe the purpose of smear test is to detect existing cancer (Walsh, 2006)
 - ❑ Consistent with results from other studies (e.g., Hellsten et al., 2007; Jones et al., 1996; Juraskova et al., 2007)
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Discussion

- It is clear from this study that patients experience high levels of colposcopy-related anxiety and worry
 - In addition, certain fears are associated with greater levels of anxiety, i.e., fear of cancer, concern about the colposcopy procedure itself, embarrassment, and effect on fertility
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Discussion

- This is one of few studies to examine levels of pain and discomfort in colposcopy patients
 - Pain subjective: 30% reported no pain, 28% reported high levels of pain. In addition, 52% reported high levels of discomfort
 - These results indicate that women find the colposcopy examination distressing, and levels of pain and discomfort are higher than previously reported (Bennetts et al., 1995; Chan et al., 2003)
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Implications and Suggestions

- The psychological consequences of attending for colposcopy may be greater than previously thought
 - Currently no agreement among researchers regarding the most suitable type of intervention to reduce anxiety in this patient group (see Galaal et al., 2007)
 - Information-based interventions have largely failed to reduce anxiety (e.g., Byrom et al., 2002; Howells et al., 1999)
 - Focus on interventions during colposcopy
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