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Cervical Cancer
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Introduction

According to the latest statistics from the American Cancer Society, 11,995 women were diagnosed with cervical cancer in 2013 and 4,217 women died from this disease (American Cancer Society, 2016). It is a disease that most often occurs in women over 30 years of age (American Cancer Society, 2016). Guidelines for the Prevention and Early Detection of Cervical Cancer (2015) estimates that there are 13,230 new diagnoses each year in women over 30, and the Center for Disease Control (2016) estimates there are 20,700 new diagnoses each year worldwide and for generations to come, cervical cancer remains a major global health concern. In the United States, the American Cancer Society, 2017) states that the number of new cases of cervical cancer decreases by 8% every year and the number of deaths decreases by 7% every year because of the early detection and treatment of cervical cancer.

Signs & Symptoms

- Vaginal discharge with unpleasant smell (Peate & Jones, 2014, p. 535)
- Bloody discharge between periods or after menopause (ACS, 2017)
- Blurred vision, hearing loss, skull pain, or problems with sex, bleeding or spotting between periods or after douching or pelvic exam (ACS, 2017)
- Bloody spotting or menopause strong indication of cervical cellular change (Walker & Hamilton, 2017, p. 6)
- Pain during intercourse (Walker & Hamilton, 2017, p. 6)

Pathophysiology

Cervical cancer is one of the most common cancers among women worldwide (American Cancer Society, 2017). It is caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV), which is a virus that infects the cells of the cervix. The virus causes the cells to become abnormal, which can lead to cancer. The virus is spread through sexual contact, and it can be transmitted from an infected person to another person during sexual intercourse. The virus can also be transmitted through skin-to-skin contact during sexual activity. The virus can be detected in cervical cells by using a Pap smear, which is a test that involves collecting cells from the cervix and examining them under a microscope. If the Pap smear is abnormal, it may be necessary to do further testing, such as a biopsy, to determine if cervical cancer is present. The HPV vaccine is available to help prevent cervical cancer by protecting against the strains of HPV that cause cervical cancer.

Nursing Implications

Cervical cancer was once one of the leading causes of cancer deaths among women in the United States, but according to the American Cancer Society (2017) those numbers have been cut in half because of the increased use of the Pap test. This screening allows advanced practitioners to find changes in the cervix before it develops into cancer or if it is already cancer, catch at an early, curable stage. Research has found that education on the HPV virus and the need for early and continuous screening is important in protecting against and treating cervical cancer. The U.S. Preventive Task Force (2012) latest recommendation on screening for women breaks down the population into five different categories (see Appendix) for screening and prevention. These are the most current recommendations and are implemented by the U.S. Preventive Task Force. It is currently working on updating these guidelines.

Conclusion

While cervical cancer is not the killer among women it used to be, it is still a concern among women ages 21 to 65. Most types of cervical cancer are caused by the HPV virus. With the proper screening tests and HPV vaccine, this disease can be detected in cervical cells before it becomes invasive cancer. Along with proper screening, patients need to be aware of the symptoms associated with this disease. Women must understand the importance of bringing these symptoms and any other symptoms they experience “out of the ordinary” to their APN’s attention. Such vigilance can lead to catching the disease early, thus avoiding invasive treatment and or possibly death.