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Uptake of Cervical Screening in a Sample of Uk Female Psychiatric Inpatients

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Introduction- There is little information on cervical screening attendance in the psychiatric population. 78.3% of the general population have been screened once in five years. Evidence suggests that women with mental illness are less likely to engage in recommended health screening programmes. Reasons for non-attendance include shame and embarrassment, lack of knowledge, fear of a positive result, beliefs that the procedure may cause cancer and a high rate of sexual abuse, rendering the procedure too traumatic.

Standard: Cervical screening in the UK- recommended every 3 years for women aged 25-49 and every 5 years for women aged 50-64. Expected standard 100%

Method: Cross-sectional survey of psychiatric inpatient sample, including ages 25-64, inpatient sample size 28. Questioned individuals about awareness of cervical screening programme, last/next screening date and cross-correlated with primary care records

Results: 25 (90%) were aware of cervical screening programme. 20 (70%) claimed correspondence from their doctor and had accepted the screening. Further analysis of primary care records indicated only 8(36%) had actually had the screening, with 20 (64%) being non responders.

Conclusion: Women with mental illness are 50% less likely to attend a cervical screening programme, compared to general population. Level of education appears to be an important indicator of uptake, regardless of severity and duration of illness.

Recommendations: Further exploration of identifying barriers to accepting such important screening tests needs to be conducted in the psychiatric population and raising awareness of such screening should not only be the domain of primary care, but also mental health services.