



## **Female Cancer** *Programme*

### Help the DoH and the Female Cancer Programme Screen 12 000 Women in 2011

The Female Cancer Programme, in partnership with the Department of Health, has set the target of screening over 12,000 women for cervical cancer in 2011 using a new screening method called Visual Inspection with Acetic acid (VIA) – the first project of its kind in South Africa. Cervical cancer is the biggest killer of the cancers affecting South African women today. Since 2008 the Female Cancer Programme has performed over 23,000 VIA screenings.

The cervix is the name given to the opening of a woman's womb. Doctors recommend that women go for cervical screening one year after becoming sexually active and continue with regular screening thereafter. Conventional screening using the Pap smear requires that a sample of cervical cells be collected that must then be sent to a laboratory for testing. Weeks or sometimes even months later, the patient is recalled to the clinic or hospital to receive the results. This is a costly test for both government and the patient, who must often travel long distances to get to the local clinic.

Sister Tolo-Bam, a government nurse who has been performing VIA since the beginning of the project is very happy with this new screening procedure, 'VIA is much better for the patients and the nurses, since it saves so much time and is so easy to perform.' VIA tests for the presence of the human papilloma virus (HPV), which mostly causes cervical cancer and is performed using acetic acid yielding a result within 3 minutes. Should the patient test HPV positive, she is then treated immediately with cryotherapy. Cryotherapy uses nitrous oxide to freeze the affected cells, which causes them to slough off, thus eliminating the virus that causes cervical cancer.

Although the HPV vaccine became available in 2009, at a cost of approximately R2,000 for the series of injections, the vaccine is totally inaccessible to the women who are the most vulnerable.

'One of the things we are trying to achieve alongside screening as many women as possible is creating awareness in the community around cervical cancer prevention, as well as informing various organizations and the Health Department about the remarkable benefits of using the VIA and cryotherapy combination in place of the Pap smear. This screening and treatment combination should be implemented by government alongside, or even in place of the Pap smear, since it is cheaper and more effective in the fight against cervical cancer,' says Lisa Aspeling, National Liaison Officer of the Female Cancer Programme.

The NGO is set to withdraw its activity at the close of 2011, using the remainder of the year to train more government staff and hand over the project and its equipment to the Eastern Cape Department of Health for further implementation across the province.

The FCP offers the VIA screening method free in various clinics in the Eastern Cape. VIA is available at the following clinics: Burgersdorp; Zwelitsha; Ndevana; Mount Coke; Dimbaza; Ginsberg; Motto Farm; Amahleke; NU 5, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17; Berlin; Walter Sisulu University; Potsdam; Mpongo; Openshaw; Tsabo Village; Twecu; Zikhova; Barkley East; Duncan Village Day Hospital; Beacon Bay; Central; Nontyatyambo Community Health Centre and Komga. The Female Cancer Programme is also targeting training 1,200 private and government health professionals in VIA and cryotherapy during 2011.

Refer friends and family members to the Female Cancer Programme for screening today – you could be saving a loved one's life. For more information on receiving free training in VIA and cryotherapy, please contact Zoe Ndobe on 083 742 4424 or Lisa Aspeling on 072 092 3575, or email [lisa.aspeling@gmail.com](mailto:lisa.aspeling@gmail.com). For more information go to [www.femalecancerprogram.org](http://www.femalecancerprogram.org)