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Improving Cervical Cancer screening rates:
A quality improvement pilot initiative

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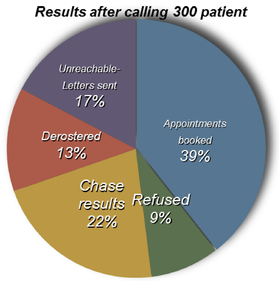
Objective:

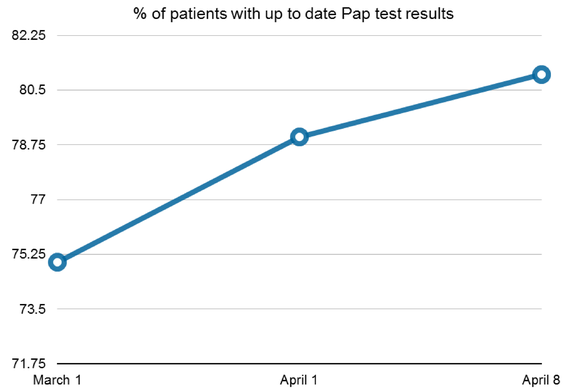
Our FHT piloted a program to increase our rates of cervical cancer screening, using our clerical staff to help identify and reach out to eligible women who needed screening. We wanted to evaluated the cost and effectiveness of this approach. Our overall cervical cancer screening rates were at 75% and we were hoping to achieve an 80% screening rate with this intervention.

Background:

"Cervical cancer is preventable. Each year, about 630 women are diagnosed with cancer of the cervix and about 150 women die from this disease in Ontario. Screening is the only way to detect the early changes that might lead to cervical cancer. Most cervical cancers are diagnosed in women who have never been screened or have not been screened regularly." Cancer Care Ontario[1.]

Improving cancer screening is a common goal across FHTs. Our clinic had been chiefly relying on opportunistic screening, whereby the physicians and nurses identified eligible patients when they presented for an appointment. We were interested to know if we could use our clerical staff to help identify and contact patients who required cancer screening. We hypothesized this could be more effective than other methods.





Methods:

The project was conducted over a one month period. One clerk was designated to be in charge of the project.

1. An EMR search was done by the clerical staff using PS Suite for any eligible patients requiring cervical cancer screening according to MOHLTC guidelines.

2. The list was distributed to the providers to identify patients who could be excluded from screening (i.e.: previously refused, hysterectomy)

3. The patients were called by the clerical staff and booked in for PAP testing

4. For patients identified as needing cervical cancer screening who already had booked appointments for other reasons - reminders to the provider were added to the appointment schedule.

1. https://www.cancercare.on.ca/pcs/screening/cervscreening/

Results:

439 patients due for PAP
300 reminder calls made to patients
100 patients booked for PAP appointments (23%)
50 patients with existing appointments given PAP tests opportunely (11%)
30 patients found to no longer be patients of the clinic. Patients were de-rostered from the EMR.

At the beginning of the project, 75% of eligible patients had up to date PAP result data. At the end of the project (5 weeks), 81% of eligible patients in the clinic had received a pap test.

The cost of the project was one clerk's time (80 hours, approximately $2,500).

Discussion:

This project resulted in better preventive care for our patients. 150 patients, or 34% of those targeted, had a cervical cancer screening test within the month, and the percentage of those eligible rose from 75% to 81%

It highlighted the fact that 34% of identified patients were ready and willing to have a PAP test, but had not done so. This led to consideration about how best to improve these numbers.

Providers were very receptive to this telephone approach. In addition this process also improved provider awareness of the EMR search capabilities for cancer screening as well as their knowledge about the characteristics and needs of their patient panel .

Ideas for the improvement of this and other screening rates are now being considered and implemented. These include regular identification of eligible patients, encouragement of the team of clerical staff, nurses and providers to use opportunistic appointments to update cancer screening, and planning possible telephone blitzes.