A Woman-to-Woman Approach to Increasing Knowledge about Gynecologic Cancer: CDC’s Inside Knowledge Campaign

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Background
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Office on Women’s Health, is developing and implementing the Inside Knowledge: Get the Facts About Gynecologic Cancer campaign. The initiative is designed to increase awareness of women and health care providers about gynecologic cancer and supports the Gynecologic Cancer Education and Awareness Act of 2005, or Jenkins Law. The principal communication objectives of Inside Knowledge are to:

1. Raise awareness of the five main types of gynecologic cancer: cervical, ovarian, uterine, vaginal and vulvar.
2. Encourage women to pay attention to their bodies and know what is normal for them, in order to increase recognition of warning signs and symptoms.
3. Encourage women to see a health care provider and ask about gynecologic cancers when faced with warning signs.

Methods
To inform campaign development, CDC conducted formative research, concept, and material testing.

Creative Concepts
When shown creative concepts for print and broadcast public service announcements (PSAs) and posters, participants in both English and Spanish groups expressed a preference for:

• Stories depicting real women of various ages, races, and ethnicities with whom they could identify, especially women who had survived or had a personal connection to gynecologic cancer.

Results
Generally, women indicated a desire to learn more about gynecologic cancers. Women were familiar with common types of gynecologic cancers, most notably cervical, ovarian, and uterine. However, they were largely unfamiliar with the following:

• Vaginal and uterine cancers

1. “I don’t think I’ve heard enough of uterine cancer or vaginal cancer.”
   (Maria, Miami)

2. “Gynecologic cancer symptoms”
   (Speck, Miami)

3. “Screening options”
   (Cervical is the only cancer for which population-based screening programs, recommended using the Pap test, but women in the focus groups stated they didn’t feel the Pap test screens for several types of gynecologic cancer and other conditions.

4. “I assumed that with the Pap smear, it checks for everything.”
   (Gay, Miami)

5. “It’s making me wonder about, you know, when I go to have a Pap… it’s just another one I’m even thinking about it. I’m just going to have it right there. No big deal.”
   (Gay, Miami)

6. “I am just hoping that we get the right information to the right people, and when they should be checked, and what to expect from this.”
   (Gay, Miami)

7. I think that you are an actual survivor versus an actor. I feel that she’s telling directly, you know, what she’s actually going through.
   (Stephanie, New York City)

8. “You could be your sister or your mother in your neighborhood, and it’s good to see that she pulled through this, which gives other people hope.”
   (Stephanie, New York City)

9. “I wish I was able to hear from someone who was diagnosed with cancer. And she encourage you to see a doctor. If it was dealt with and the point, I think it was just this thing was when she said financing can really drive the difference in the outcome, we just really think that was very important, I gave it a 6 on, for appeal.”
   (Stephanie, Las Vegas)

Conclusions
Testimonials can be very compelling in health communications. As such, the Inside Knowledge campaign features ‘real’ women as often as possible, including gynecologic cancer survivors of different ages, races, and ethnicities, and having different gynecologic cancers.

Research into Practice
We engaged partners to help identify women to feature in Inside Knowledge materials, including women of a variety of races and ethnicities who reflect a range of gynecologic cancer experiences.

Step 1: Gynecologic Cancer

• Identified 62 organizations, including CDC’s National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program and National Comprehensive Cancer Control Program grantees.

• Advocacy groups, such as the Cancer Institute of California, the National Cancer Coalition, and the Gynecologic Cancer Foundation (now known as the Foundation for Women’s Cancer).

• Health care clinics and medical centers.

• Monitored internet search engines for stories on gynecologic cancer and survivors.

• From this search, we identified 62 gynecologic cancer survivors.

Step 2: IDENTIFY AND DISCOVER

• Developed an interview guide to ensure all women were asked relevant questions about their cancer symptoms, diagnosis, treatment, and current health status.

• Contacted 62 women to assess their interest and willingness to share their stories. Of 62 women contacted, 34 agreed to participate, and were interviewed on phone.

Step 3: ASSESS/SET PERSONAL STORIES

CDC communications, medical, and scientific experts reviewed stories to assess:

• Clinical relevance.

• Whether cancer diagnosis, treatment, and prognosis were typical of all cancers, or raised too many questions and led to fears. For example, we chose to include one woman who said she was a cervical cancer survivor who was misdiagnosed and treated for more suggestive of dysplasia than cancer.

Step 4: DEVEL MATERIALS

• Six women were selected to appear in campaign materials and on the web site.

• Three photo shoots were held to accommodate schedules and travel logistics.

• We worked with the women to ensure their stories were accurate and engaging.