

**Media Release
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New approach in cervical screening encouraging hundreds more Pacific women into national programme

A new way of training nurses in cervical screening has resulted in a jump in the number of Pacific women in Counties Manukau having a regular cervical smear.

Ruth Davy of WONS, a nursing, education and health promotion service, told the Public Health Association conference in Dunedin today that approximately 240 more Pacific women than any other group were screened between last September and March this year, as a result of the new training.

"Two key elements of the course, which began in March last year, are training in cultural competency, and ongoing clinical support," Ms Davy told the delegates.

"A nurse is culturally competent when she focuses on the importance of identifying Māori and Pacific women on her database who are overdue for cervical smears, the importance of letters to patients being in te reo and Pacific languages; when she ensures the room where a smear is taken is private, pleasantly presented and non-clinical and when she is able to engage appropriately so the women are comfortable with her."

Māori and Pacific women have higher rates of cervical cancer than other New Zealand women and their rates of cervical screening are lower. The National Cervical Screening Programme aims for an overall rate of 75 percent. In Counties Manukau, the rate for Māori was 48 percent and for Pacific women 52 percent. Ruth Davy told the conference addressing these inequalities led to the new training framework.

"Counties Manukau DHB's (March 2009) latest cervical screening coverage rate (a cervical smear in the last three years) for Pacific women is now 60.5 percent, an increase of 8.5 percent. This increase is greater than other regions by more than 2.5 percent. I believe this is due to programme promotion, recruitment, communications, smear taker training and service delivery all working well together."

Ms Davy told the delegates that a second critical feature of the new course was the on-going clinical support of the trainee nurse smear takers.

"An experienced nurse facilitator supervised each of the students to make sure they were delivering key messages to their patients, like the importance of a smear every three years, the fact that it's free to women 20-69 years of age and the high success rate for treatment of abnormal cells. The nurse facilitator also observed the trainee nurses taking some smears which helped their confidence immensely."

Ruth Davy is now calling for full time clinical support of smear takers to improve the delivery of screening.

“If this keeps up, Counties Manukau DHB’s Pacific cervical screening rates will reach the national coverage rate within two years which is an outstanding result.”

“Unfortunately no Māori nurses went through the course. Trainee nurses were working with Māori women which makes the need for them to be culturally competent all the more important. The rate of Māori women getting screened in Counties Manukau increased by just over 5 percent which while positive could have been higher. So we do need to address the training of Māori nurses in cervical smear taking in the future.”

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