KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES AND UNIVERSITY PRACTICES ON PREVENTION OF CERVICAL CANCER

PROCEDIMENTOS, ACTITUDES Y PRÁCTICAS DE UNIVERSITARIAS SOBRE LA PREVENCIÓN DEL CÁNCER CERVICOUTERINO

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to describe the knowledge, attitudes and practices of academics on cervical cancer prevention. Method: a sectional study with a quantitative approach, carried out with 298 students from the first period of undergraduate courses at a federal university, from the application of a questionnaire. The analysis of the variables was given by the descriptive statistics expressed in absolute and percentage frequencies. Results: the majority of the students are young, financially dependent, unmarried, present adequate knowledge about the Pap smear and its importance. Half presents adequate knowledge regarding the periodicity of the exam, priority target population and the importance of condom use. Conclusion: it is necessary to create strategies that arouse in the academic the interest about cervical cancer prevention and periodic Pap smear.

RESUMO

Objetivo: descrever o conhecimento, atitudes e práticas de acadêmicas sobre a prevenção do câncer cervicouterino. Método: estudo seccional, com abordagem quantitativa, realizado com 298 alunas do primeiro período dos cursos de graduação de uma universidade federal, a partir da aplicação de questionário. A análise das variáveis se deu pela estatística descritiva expressa em frequências absolutas e percentuais. Resultados: a maioria das acadêmicas é jovem, dependente financeiramente, solteira, apresenta conhecimento adequado sobre o exame Papanicolau e sua importância. Metade apresenta conhecimento adequado em relação à periodicidade de realização do exame, população-alvo prioritária e importância de utilização de preservativos. Quanto a atitudes e práticas de realização do exame, a minoria o realiza regularmente. Conclusão: é necessária a criação de estratégias que despertem nas acadêmicas o interesse sobre a prevenção do câncer cervicouterino e realização periódica do exame Papanicolau.

Descriptores: Educação em Saúde; Enfermagem; Esfregaço Vaginal; Saúde da Mulher.
INTRODUCTION

The problem of cancer (CA) in Brazil has stood out and, with it, gained space in the political and technical agendas of the government. According to estimates by the World Health Organization (WHO) for the year 2030, it is expected to occur 27 million cases of CA and 17 million deaths from neoplasms, with the highest incidence occurring in low and middle-income countries Income.1

In this perspective, according to data from the National Cancer Institute (INCA), in Brazil, estimates for 2016, also valid for 2017, indicate the occurrence of approximately 596 new cases of neoplasia.1 It is worth noting that, The AC of the cervix as the third most incident type in the female population. According to INCA, the number of new cases of cervical uterine CA expected in Brazil in 2014 was 15,590, with an estimated risk of 15 cases per 100,000 women.2 The ratio between mortality and incidence for the CA of the cervix The death rate of 265,000 women in the year 2012, with 87% of these deaths occurring among women in developing countries.2 By 2016, 16,340 new cases of CA of the cervix, with an estimated risk of 16 cases per 100,000 women.1

The strategy implemented in Brazil for the control of cervical cancer is the Pap smear exam in women between 25 and 64 years of age, guarantee of organization, completeness and quality of services and actions of the line of care, as well as the treatment And follow-up of patients.2

The importance of the use of efficient methods in the tracing of this neoplasia, which includes an effective coverage of the population for the accomplishment of this examination, the quality in the collection and interpretation of the material and of the treatment and adequate follow-up, so that the women feel it, If they are motivated to perform the Pap smear and have at their disposal an adequate service network capable of meeting their needs. 3 However, since there are still women who are unaware of the purpose of the Pap smear, it is necessary to structure permanent educational activities that sensitize the Women on the exam4, even in differentiated populations. It was observed that nursing students from a university in the Northeast of Brazil, have the most inadequate knowledge about the exam.5

It is important to verify the knowledge of undergraduate students about the subject in order to carry out educational activities, since in the future they will be users of the tracking programs and, many of them, disseminators of information. In this context, the objective was:

- To describe the knowledge, attitudes and practices of academics on cervical cancer prevention.

METHOD

A sectional study, with a quantitative approach, conducted at the Federal University of the Triângulo Mineiro (UFTM), involving 23 undergraduate courses in health, human and exact areas.

The study population consisted of 298 students from the first period of undergraduate courses. Students over 18 years of age, regularly enrolled in the first semester or first year of the annual courses were included. Those that did not fit the inclusion criteria or those that refused to participate in the survey were excluded.

Data collection took place from August to December 2012, and was carried out through the application of a structured questionnaire constructed by the authors based on a detailed review of the scientific literature and consultation with the guidelines of the Brazilian Ministry of Health.

The students were approached and clarified about the importance and objective of the research and the procedures to which they would be submitted. After the acceptance of these and the signing of the Informed Consent Term (TCLE), the self-applicative instrument of data collection was distributed in the classroom during breaks or at the end of the didactic activities and with the consent and Authorization of the responsible teacher.

The instrument used questioned the socio-demographic characterization (age, occupation, income and marital status) and, on the knowledge, attitudes and practices adopted regarding the prevention of CA of the cervix.

The data was compiled in the Microsoft Excel® database. The technique of double digit validation was used in order to detect inconsistencies. For the statistical analysis, the data were imported into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 17.0.

The analysis of the quantitative and categorical variables was done by descriptive statistics and its interpretation was performed through a quantitative context and expressed in numerical and percentage form.

For the development of the study, the opinion and approval of the Human Research Ethics Committee (CEP) of UFTM, approved under protocol CEP / UFTM 2087/11, was
requested. It should be noted that the project followed Resolution 196/96, since its approval predates Resolution 466/12.

Results and Discussion

Among the 298 students who participated in the study, it was observed that the mean age was 20.30 years. The vast majority, 267 (89.6%), had their studies as the main daily occupation and 220 (73.8%) had no income of their own and were dependent on their relatives. Still, 260 (87.2%) were single and 185 (62.1%), were sexually active, of which, 82 (27.5%) reported having no fixed partner.

The data in this study is similar to those of other studies that characterize the profile of academic students of public universities in Brazil. Most are considered young, so, they enter higher education soon after finishing high school. They have study as the main occupation and depend on the income of family members, probably, because they attend university in day or full time, which can make employment difficult. The marital situation of the majority is single, showing that they prefer to postpone the officialization of fixed relationships, which does not exclude the existence of fixed or unfixed sexual partners.

Mapping the socio-demographic profile of a particular population under study is of great importance, since the knowledge of this population can vary due to age, occupation, schooling and marital status, influencing the direction of educational activities.

When asked about the knowledge about the Pap smear, 288 (96.6%) students said they knew the exam. Regarding the importance of the Pap smear, the vast majority, 257 (86.2%), said to be an important exam in the prevention of CA of the uterine cervix, given higher than that found in a study carried out with nursing students in the State of Piauí, where only 60 (40.5%) reported that the purpose of the examination is the detection and prevention of CA of the cervix. This difference can be due to the possible regional peculiarities that exist in Brazil. The AC of the uterine cervix is more incidental and presents a higher mortality in the Northeast, compared to the Southeast region. Possibly, the lack of knowledge regarding the importance of the examination in the control of this CA is one of the causes of its high morbidity and mortality.

It is important to note that, in this research, in spite of the great majority of the students being aware of the importance of the exam, 41 (13.8%) of the students claimed they did not know its importance. Thus, the need to perform articulated and integrated actions with the intention of increasing the knowledge regarding the purpose of the Pap smear for the undergraduate students is perceived.

As for the sex life of this population, 185 (62.1%), were sexually active, of which, 82 (27.5%) reported having no fixed partner. Among the 298 students who participated in the study, it was observed that the mean age was 20.30 years. The vast majority, 267 (89.6%), had their studies as the main daily occupation and 220 (73.8%) had no income of their own and were dependent on their relatives. Still, 260 (87.2%) were single and 185 (62.1%), were sexually active, of which, 82 (27.5%) reported having no fixed partner.

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As for the sex life of this population, 185 (62.1%), were sexually active, of which, 82 (27.5%) reported having no fixed partner. It is observed, in the literature that women consider the Pap smear as a useful tool to detect for cancer. Because of this, the Pap smear becomes the best to detect precursor lesions that are still asymptomatic. The nomenclature used in the exams reports is currently based on the Bethesda System, and describes the squamous and Their equivalences. Thus, the Pap smear result is not intended to diagnose STDs and vaginal infections. However, in relation to Human Papillomavirus (HPV) infection which is considered to be the main risk factor for uterine cervix CA, the Pap smear only suggests the possibility of its infection, being necessary diagnostic complementation.

Regarding the beginning of the examination, 233 (78.2%) students stated that the Pap smear should be performed by all women, who have or have had sexual intercourse. It is noteworthy that 36 students (12%) reported that the test should be started in all women, regardless of age or those older than 14 years.

The new Brazilian guidelines for cervical CA screening recommend the commencement of Pap smear collections at the age of 25 for women who have already had sexual activity. Thus, it is perceived that it is extremely important to elaborate actions that favor the increase of the knowledge of these academics in relation to the beginning of the preventive practices.

Regarding the frequency of Pap smears 150 (50.3%) students said that the test should be performed annually. Already 71 (23.8%) stated that it should be done every six months. According to the new Brazilian guidelines, triennial examinations are recommended after two negative annual examinations. However, the frequency becomes individualized, according to the results of the Pap smear, which may be up to six-monthly.

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should be considered that subjecting women to examination more often than necessary can increase the costs of the health system. On the other hand, there is a need to verify if there is a veiled demand of women who have never performed the exam, either for personal reasons or for the organization and structuring of health services. Adherence to the appropriate periodicity for conducting the examination also implies the equitable distribution of the resources of the health system.

When analyzing the responses related to measures to prevent cervical CS, 154 (51.7%) female students reported that the use of condoms during sexual intercourse did not prevent the appearance of the cervix CA. Regarding the possible forms of prevention for CA of the cervix, 253 (84.9%) students claimed not to know these measures.

The analysis of these data is necessary since a large part of the population interviewed is unaware of the importance of using condoms as a means of preventing cancer. It is emphasized that factors associated with HPV infection, such as early onset of sexual activity, multiplicity of partners, sexual partner with multiple partners, smoking and recurrent genital infections, predisposes women to increased risk for cervical lesions and, consequently, development of the AC of the cervix. Primary prevention is associated with the reduction of HPV infection, which includes the use of condoms during intercourse, as well as the bivalent and quadrivalent vaccines, which immunize the woman against HPV oncogenic subtypes.

Regarding the frequency with which the student performs the Pap smear, only 98 (32.9%) of the students reported taking the exam annually, while 140 (47%) said they had never performed the exam. Considering that 185 (62.1%) reported being sexually active, of these, 82 (27.5%) reported having no fixed partner, it is notorious that part of the vulnerable students is not included in the context of the prevention of CAD in the cervix of the uterus.

Considering that, according to INCA data, it is estimated that a reduction of about 80% in the mortality of women aged 25-64 years per CA of the cervix can be achieved through Pap smears and by the treatment of precursor lesions with high potential for malignancy or carcinoma in situ, the importance of periodic Pap smear by sexually active women is noted here.

It should be noted that this high rate of non-performance of the exam may be related to some difficulties, which, in practice, are observed, acting as obstacles and preventing women from taking the exam. In this context, a study carried out in the state of Rio Grande do Sul showed, that the main impediments to the Pap smear, were the embarrassment during the test, lack of knowledge about its importance, fear of pain or positive result and low power Acquisition.

In addition to the above results, another study shows that: living without a partner, not having given birth, not having had a medical visit in the last year and the low level of schooling are also factors that are associated with not performing the exam. Nursing, that stands out for its holistic education and directed to health education, can contribute effectively to the increase of adhesion to the Pap smear exam, through educational activities and orientations directed to the target population of the problem in question.

Emphasis is given to the need to expand access to information through health education campaigns, using techniques and languages appropriate to the population profile, emphasizing the periodicity of the examination, the active search of women and the improvement of quality of health services, aiming at greater adherence to the examination and, consequently, reduction of mortality from related causes. Still, despite the orientation of inclusion of women in the age group of 25 to 64 years in the prevention programs of the Cervical cancer, it is verified that women under the age of 25 are as vulnerable as those of 25 years to the development of this cancer, and it is important that the prevention actions reach them, allowing a real impact on the target population.

**CONCLUSION**

The accomplishment of this study made evident the need for the transmission of information regarding the Pap smear exam, which presents itself as a fundamental tool in Nursing care, since it was observed lack of knowledge related to the subject, as well as low adherence to the test. It was hoped to find a greater number of correct answers and adherence to the preventive practices of cervical cancer among young people with access to training and information.

The Pap smear is an important method for the prevention and diagnosis of cervical cancer, and the health professional and the media must act in an efficient way in their orientation and dissemination. Thus, these data point us to the need to create strategies and programs that arouse, in the academic,
the interest about the prevention of cervical cancer and periodic Pap smears.

It is pointed out, as limitations of this study, the fact that the data collection was done through a closed instrument, which did not allow the detailed exploration of the students’ knowledge. Possibly, correct information traces would be found in discursive responses. However, the study points to the need to invest in training for the self-care of university students.

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