

Cervical Cancer In Nigeria and the Society for Family Health

Cervical cancer is one of the commonest cancers in women, second only to breast cancer. It kills an estimated 275,000 women every year and 500,000 new cases are reported annually worldwide. This entirely preventable disease is the second largest cancer killer of women in low and middle-income countries, with most women dying in the prime of life. About 88% of the deaths occur in developing countries. Mortality Rates highlights that Africa is the most dangerous place to be a woman with cervical cancer. All ten of the countries (including Nigeria) with the highest cervical cancer mortality rate are found in Africa.

The burden of the disease remains high in the country, with Nigeria having a mortality rate of 22.9% an annual death rate of 9659* (5th highest death burden in the world). Cervical cancer screening has been identified as the most cost effective approach to cervical cancer control worldwide, but unfortunately, only about 5% of women in developing countries have ever been screened for this deadly disease, unlike their counterparts in the developed countries. Society for Family (SFH) with funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation is one of the few organizations in Nigeria working assiduously to see that this terrible trend is reversed through the provision of screening (using the Visual Inspection with acetic acid (VIA) method) and treatment services with Cryotherapy.

Society for family Health currently operates the Healthy Family Network, a social franchise network of over 340 privately owned facilities spread across 23 states of the federation, including the FCT. The network currently supports the providers in several health areas like reproductive health (family planning), maternal, neonatal and child health areas including malaria, diarrhea disease, pneumonia, etc. Through the cervical cancer screening and preventative therapy (CCS&PT) project, over 45 of these providers have been trained and actively providing services in the area of both cervical cancer screening (using VIA method) and cryotherapy services. SFH now has about 12 cryotherapy machines, 10 of which are located in franchised clinics while two are being used by dedicated outreach teams that move to hard to reach communities providing both screening and treatment services to women, thereby saving many lives.

Using the social franchise approach and with funding support, screening services can be effectively scaled up in a cost effective manner to all our franchised outlets thereby making the services available and accessible to millions of Nigerian women in locations close to them and at an affordable price. This is because of the power of integration that is available under the social franchise setup where screening and treatment services can be

easily and seamlessly integrated into their reproductive health services as we have done in some of the facilities. This in our experience, has helped to significantly increase our reach and thereby saving more lives, and has also turned around positively the status of the facilities/providers as there has been a surge in their client flow (both for screening and assessment of other services) with the attendant increase in revenue for the facilities.

The interest and demand for capacity building in this area by providers in and outside of the network has grown beyond what we can presently handle with our current level of funding, and SFH is exploring innovative ways and arrangement to handle this huge demand. This is also one of the easiest ways to also ensure the sustainability of these services beyond donor funding since cervical cancer screening sits seamlessly within their reproductive and family planning service with minimal material requirement.

SFH currently screens over 4500 women per quarter, with limited cryotherapy service for those who are positive because of the small number of machines we have. With more donor support however, more women can be screened (about 10,000-15,000 per quarter) and more of the women who tested positive can benefit from cryotherapy services if we are able to support/set up more outreach teams with the purchase of more cryotherapy machines. SFH through her strong social franchise system has been positioned to take cervical cancer screening and treatment service to many more Nigerians in almost all the states of the federation in a cost effective manner, thereby saving more precious lives from this preventable death.

For more information on Cervical Cancer screening sites and the Society for Family Health, please email info@sfnigeria.org or visit any of our social media pages on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter

