
PapScreen Media 2003/2004: Pre-campaign Interviews Report

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Introduction

The purpose of this study was to provide information to assist PapScreen to prepare an advertising agency brief for a television advertisement to encourage under-screened women to have a Pap test. From this brief, the advertising agencies will develop some proposed advertising concepts, and those concepts will be assessed in focus groups.

Under-screened women have had at least one Pap test but have not had one for at least two years, but for the purposes of the research only those who had not had a test for at least three years were recruited. This was to ensure that they had really lapsed in their screening, rather than simply being a little overdue.

Participants

The sample for this study was comprised of 34 female participants recruited by a market research recruitment company using a structured screening questionnaire. Exclusion criteria included having had a hysterectomy.

The sample was stratified by age and socio economic status. There were nine women aged between 30 and 39, eight aged 40 to 49, nine aged 50 to 59 and eight who were between 60 and 69. About half the participants were classified as lower socio-economic status and 50 half higher socio-economic status. Participants were remunerated with a \$20 shopping voucher.

Procedure

The interviews were approximately 15 minutes in length and were conducted by a trained, experienced interviewer. A semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix A) was used to examine participants' knowledge regarding Pap tests (in particular the recommended intervals for the Pap test), the emotions aroused when women have had a Pap test and perceived barriers to having a Pap test.

The interviews were all audio- taped, with the permission of the participants, and the tapes were transcribed. A qualitative, thematic analysis of the interviews group transcripts was performed.

Results

Feelings before, during and after a Pap test

Over half the women interviewed remembered some negative feelings associated with their last Pap test. Generally these women experienced feelings of anxiety and nervousness before the test. Many women reported that they felt uncomfortable or awkward during the test and generally they felt relieved and happy after the procedure was over and when they received their results. There were two participants who reported strong negative feelings such as devastation and shock when they received their results because they had low-grade abnormal cells.

“A little bit nervous” (Before)

“Apprehensive” (Before)

“Physically unpleasant but bearable” (During)

“Mildly uncomfortable and mildly embarrassing” (During)

“Glad I had it done (After)

“Relieved and it was pain free” (After)

There was a group of women who did not appear to be concerned about having a Pap test at all. These women reported neutral or positive emotions before, during and after the test. Several of these women reported they felt ‘relieved’ when they received their results, which suggests some degree of apprehension or anxiety regarding the results although these feelings were not specifically reported during the interviews.

“It didn’t worry me”

“I’ve had so many internal examinations I don’t feel any discomfort at all”

“Fine”

Interestingly, there were very few women who reported feeling extreme negative emotions or physical sensations while having their Pap test. One woman reported feeling terrified before the test but felt relieved afterwards. A small number of women said that they found their last pap test painful. Generally, women reported that they felt uncomfortable during the test but most did not think that it was a painful experience. This suggests that for these women the Pap test was not a particularly negative experience despite being mildly nervous before and uncomfortable during the test. In fact, the majority of women interviewed reported feeling good, happy and relieved after they had had the Pap test, even before getting their results, although some had felt nervous and apprehensive beforehand.

Why do women lapse?

There were several reasons reported by women explaining their lapse in having a Pap test. Approximately one fifth of women reported that they had not had a Pap test for over two years because they last one they had was painful, uncomfortable or embarrassing.

“It is unpleasant and it’s embarrassing and yeah it does hurt”

“The one before was painful and actually caused bleeding”

“It is very uncomfortable and not a nice feeling”

The time it takes to have a Pap test appeared to be an important barrier for many women. A large proportion of women reported that they were too busy and had difficulty finding the time to have a Pap test. The time it takes to drive to their doctor, long waiting periods and work and family commitments were the main factors that contributed to women feeling like they were too busy to have a Pap test. For some women, being busy was not as important as simply not realising that two years had passed since their last test.

“I have been really busy the last two years and you tend to lose track of time”

“I’m just too bogged down in my work and I don’t have any time for myself”

“Time just crept away”

A small proportion of women reported that they thought they were not at risk of developing cervical cancer. Some thought they were past an age where the risk was very high. Other women thought that because they were not sexually active that their risk was minimal and did not need to have regular Pap tests.

“I thought that I was past the stage where I might have been at risk”

“I think because I’m not so sexually active I think I’m not going to get cervical cancer”

The idea that women would know if something was wrong with their body appeared to be another factor that contributed to a lapse in having a Pap test. A number of women thought that they would be more likely to have a Pap test if they noticed an unusual discharge or sensed that something was not right.

As well as being simply asked about their reasons for not being up-to-date with their Pap tests, women were also prompted to discuss a number of potential barriers. It is worth noting that some barriers identified in other studies were not seen as problems by this group. Only one woman reported that she delayed her Pap test because she believed that the test was not accurate enough. This was reassuring, given occasional negative publicity about the accuracy of the test. Most women accepted that two years was an appropriate interval, even though they had not been retested themselves in that timeframe, although a small proportion of women appeared unclear as to whether less often would be adequate. Difficulty with obtaining the test, either because of not feeling comfortable with their current doctor or that they did not know where to go for the test was not an issue.

Knowledge regarding Pap tests

A large proportion of women were aware that the recommended interval between Pap tests is two years. All but one woman reported that she intended to have a Pap test in the future. All women understood that the Pap test was related to prevention or detection of cancer. Some of them were unclear about the fact that the Pap test is specifically a screening test used to detect abnormal cells in the cervix. Approximately

one third of respondents clearly demonstrated that they understood that the Pap test could detect abnormal cells in the cervix, which can in turn assist in preventing and detecting cervical cancer. A small proportion of women were not clear about the purpose of the Pap test. Some thought it was a diagnostic tool for cancer; others thought it could detect abnormalities in the ovaries and uterus.

“To detect any abnormal cells in the cervix” (Correct)

“To see if the cells in your cervix are normal or abnormal” (Correct)

“It is to check for any abnormalities in the uterus” (Incorrect)

On the whole, women reported that they knew what a Pap test was for and how regularly they should have them. Most of these women understood why and when they should have a Pap test, yet they were not having regular tests.

Motivations to have a Pap test

Women mentioned three main things which could motivate them to have Pap test.

Approximately one quarter of respondents thought that regular reminders would motivate them and suggested individual letters from an external register or verbal reminders from their GP. This appears to be a logical motivator considering a large proportion of women reported that they intended to have future Pap tests, but did not realise that two years had passed. However, a central register does exist and most women who have had at least one Pap test receive a reminder after two years. Many GPs also send out reminders. While it is possible that some women in this study did not receive the reminder it is also likely that some had received it but ignored it. It may be that the current reminder system is not particularly motivating for this group of women, and that sending out just one reminder is not sufficient. Some women also suggested advertising as a way of reminding them, and moving it to a top of mind issue.

“A regular prompter, maybe an advertising campaign or just individually a letter”

“My doctor to put it in her computer and then let me know”

Approximately one fifth of women thought they would be motivated if they sensed that something was wrong. If they were not feeling well, had noticed unusual discharge or had had one abnormal Pap test they thought they would be motivated to have another. Nevertheless, most of these women reported that they would not know if something was wrong with their body. It appears that these women don't believe that they would know if they had abnormal cells in their cervix, however they are waiting for a symptom before they get a Pap test.

“Only if I wasn't well or felt that something may be wrong”

“If I really felt I wasn't well then I would”

“Discharge that I thought was not quite right”

The idea that some aspect of the process of Pap testing needs changing was reported by just under one fifth of respondents. Some women thought that the procedure was too invasive or uncomfortable and for some women painful. Other women thought the process of seeing a doctor was too time consuming and too expensive and needed to be changed accordingly.

“A clinic where you knew you didn't have to wait an hour and a half”

“If it wasn't so uncomfortable because I ended up being really sore and bleeding”

Conclusions

The women interviewed in the current study generally had a good superficial understanding of the purpose of the Pap test and the recommended interval between tests. Most women spontaneously mentioned having a Pap test as a way of preventing cervical cancer or detecting it early. However it was not clear that some really understood that the test was specific to the cervix, with some mentioning detection of uterine or ovarian cancer as well. Most women could also report that two years was the recommended time between Pap tests, despite not having met this recommendation themselves. It was not basic knowledge which was preventing them from being up-to-date with the test.

In general it appeared that Pap tests were not a high priority for these women, though they were aware they “should” do it. The majority did not report a specific reason for not having a Pap test such as a painful experience, inaccuracy of the test or being unsure of where to go for the test. The main reason reported for not having regular Pap tests was having difficulty finding the time or not realising how much time had passed since their last test. It might be worthwhile considering the actual time required for a Pap test and emphasising that it is a relatively quick procedure.

One point of concern was the group of women who thought they would know if there was something wrong with their body. This suggests that some women have some misconceptions regarding the nature of cervical abnormalities and the degree to which they would be aware of relevant symptoms. This could be addressed.

Women generally reported that they felt a degree of apprehension or nervousness before and during the Pap test. However, these emotions tended to be followed by feelings of relief after the test was completed or after they received their results. It appeared that having a Pap test was something most women thought they should do although they did not like having it done, therefore a sense of relief after the procedure was widespread among this group of women. This sense of relief might be a useful concept to emphasise.

Appendix A

Pre-campaign Interviews with Under-screened Women:

Hello, I'm from the Cancer Council Victoria. I have an appointment to speak with this afternoon/evening.

I'll just remind you that we'll be talking about issues to do with women's health, and the purpose is to help us develop some campaign messages for women like you.

Any information you give us is completely confidential. Only the researchers will have access to this information. The results will not be published in a way that enables individuals to be identified. Information supplied to the researchers is not passed on to anyone else.

If you have any questions about the study I can give you the name and contact details of the researcher. The interview will take about 20-30 minutes. As a thank you for completing in the interview we will send you a gift voucher for \$20. Although we need your name and address to send you the voucher, we will not link the information you give me with your details at any time, so everything you say will be completely confidential.

We would like to tape the telephone interviews so we can accurately record your views and it also 'frees' me up so I can focus better on what you have to say.

Do you agree to have your telephone interview taped?

YES

NO –

- 1) The first thing I want to ask you is whether you think there is anything you can do to prevent cervical cancer?
- 2) Do you think there is anything you can do to detect cervical cancer early?

- 3) I want to talk to you about your last Pap Test. Can you tell me how long it has been since you had your last Pap Test?
- 4) Where did you have that Pap Test done? *probe if nec: If it was a GP, was it their usual GP or a different one.*
- 5) What prompted you to have the test? *prompt if necessary: Did you make an appointment specifically for a Pap Test, or did the doctor suggest it when you were there about something else?*
- 6) Thinking back to that test, can you describe how you felt before you had it?
- 7) How did you feel during it?
- 8) How did you feel after it was done?
- 9) Were the results of that Pap test normal?
- 10) How did you feel when you received the results?
- 11) Before that last Pap test have you had regular Pap tests? How frequently?
- 12) Can you describe what the Pap test is for?
- 13) What do you think the advantages of having a Pap Test are?
- 14) Do you know what the recommended length of time between Pap tests is?

If No/don't know:

14a. Do you think you have gone longer than the recommended interval without having a Pap Test?

14b. Have you ever received a reminder about going to have a Pap Test?

If yes, who did the reminder come from?

Go to 15.

If Yes, but response is incorrect.

14c. Can you remember where you got that information?

14d. Actually, in Australia at the moment, the recommended interval is two years. Would knowing that make a difference to how often you had a Pap Test?

If respondent seems genuinely unaware that she is overdue for a test (eg, moved from another country with longer interval), go to Q16, otherwise go to Q15.

Yes. Correctly identify 2 year interval

14e. That's right, the recommended interval is two years. Can you tell me why you haven't had a Pap test for longer than the recommended length of time?

15) Prompted reasoning:

I'm now going to read out some of the reasons women give for not being up-to-date with their Pap Tests. I'd like you to tell me whether each one is an issue for you, and why. Some of them may be things we have already discussed. *Prompt them to discuss each issue.*

- a. I didn't realise that I was not up-to-date with my Pap Test.
- b. I found my last Pap test unpleasant and don't want to do it again.
- c. It is hard to find time to have a Pap Test.

- d. I don't really believe you need to have a test every two years, less often is fine. *If agree, find out what person believes is an appropriate interval.*
- e. I would know if there was something wrong with my body.
- f. I don't need Pap Tests any more. *Find out why she believes this.*
- g. I don't think the test is accurate enough, so I don't bother.
- h. I don't have a regular doctor, and don't know where to go for the test.
- i. I am not comfortable with the idea of my usual doctor giving me a Pap test and don't know where else to go.
- j. I would only have a Pap test if a doctor suggested it.
- k. If there was something wrong I would rather not know about it.

16. Do you intend to have a Pap test again in the future?

17. Is there anything you can think of that would make you more likely to have regular Pap tests?

18. As we've discussed, in Australia the current recommendation is to have a Pap Test every two years. If this recommendation was changed to 3 years, what would your response be?
19. Do you think you would be more likely to stick to a three year interval, or let the interval stretch further?

I just need to ask you a few details about yourself, and then we've finished.

Can you tell me your age please?

Do you work outside the home:

no

part-time

full-time

What is the highest education level you've obtained.....

Do you have any children:

no

yes: How old is your youngest....

Can you tell me what your marital status is:

Single/Never married

Partner/Married/De facto

Separated/divorced

Widowed

Thank you for taking part in this interview. The information you have provided will be very useful to us, and we really appreciate your help. You should receive your \$20 voucher in the next few days. *Either confirm or get address and put it straight onto the envelope.*

If you have any questions about Pap tests I can give you either a telephone number or a web address for you to follow up.

131120 (Cancer Helpline)