

Spotlight

By M.O.

Precursor Lesions for Cervical Adenocarcinomas Evade Early Detection

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Cancer can arise from two parts of the cervical epithelium: the squamous part, which gives rise to squamous cell carcinoma, and the glandular part, which can produce adenocarcinoma. While squamous cell carcinoma rates are declining due to early detection in cancer screening programs, the incidence of adenocarcinomas is on the rise. A major hurdle in tackling this cancer is that early lesions for this cancer, e.g., adenocarcinomas in situ (AIS), are difficult to detect by inspection or cytological examination.

Ault and colleagues report new results on incidence rates of AIS in young women in the context of the FUTURE study, a large vaccine trial against 4 subtypes of human papilloma virus involving more than 17, 000 women in North America, Latin America, Europe and Asia Pacific. The study confirmed the challenges of detection of AIS by common screening methods in a study group previously not studied for AIS, 16- to 25-year-old women. It also showed for the first time that the HPV vaccine seems to be effective against AIS although the number of AIS cases in the study was too low to be conclusive.

The overall rate of AIS was 53.8 per 100, 000 person years at risk and thereby almost 4 times lower than the incidence for squamous precursor lesions. Most of the women with AIS had an accompanying high-grade squamous lesion, and AIS was only detected 'by chance' after operation. The authors see their study as a reminder for practitioners to consider the possibility of AIS even in young women.