

Introduction

Cancer is the second major cause of death in Croatia, every fourth of our citizens dies of it. From 1978 to 2004, the incidence of cancer has increased by 58%, while deaths from cancer from 1978 to 2005 have increased by 59%. This means that there are about 20,000 new cancer cases per year in our country with 4,4 million inhabitants. Meanwhile, the cancer mortality rates in Croatia are higher than those seen in the countries of the European Union or in countries that have implemented cancer prevention and early detection programmes. Among Croatian women, breast cancer is the most common cancer overall. Cancer of the cervix is the second one in women, aged 25–49 years.

The burden of cervical cancer in Croatia is considerable as we have about 350 (332 in year 2004) incident cases and about 100 deaths from cervical cancer yearly. Although, invasive cervical cancer incidence is only the 8th most common cancer among Croatian women, the important distinction with cervical cancer is that it is almost entirely preventable. Effective, organised cervical screening programmes have been shown to prevent about 80% of cervical cancers and we need to work toward the implementation of these programmes in our country. In addition, we now have vaccines against the two most common types of HPV, the virus that can cause cervical cancer, and the implementation of vaccination programmes for pre-adolescents before the start of sexual activities carries with it the promise of even further reduction in cervical cancer rate.

Cervical cancer screening is available in Croatia but this is not being offered within a national, organised programme that effectively screens all Croatian women. Following the publication of the European Council's recommendations for cancer screening of December 2003, a working group of the Croatian Ministry of Health and Social Welfare was convened and in 2005, recommended a national programme for early detection of cancer. This represents a basic document for the implementation of organised screening programmes for cervical, breast and colorectal cancer in Croatia. Under the direction of the Croatian Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, a programme for the early detection of breast cancer started in Croatia in 2006 enrolling about 560,000 women. Now, the Croatian Ministry of Health and Social Welfare is planning a pilot project for cervical cancer screening programme and this should start before the end of the year.

In this context the Croatian Ministry of Health and Social Welfare supports the editing of this special issue of *Collegium Antropologicum*, which is dedicated to the International Workshop on Human Papillomaviruses and Consensus Recommendations for Cervical Cancer Prevention that will be held in Dubrovnik – Cavtat, Croatia from 18 to 21 April, 2007.

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