

Registered Nurse Role in Cervical Cancer Screening

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Cervical Cancer Screening in Alberta

Cervical cancer screening is a population-based, integrated approach focused on prevention, risk reduction, early detection, better treatment, enhanced survival, and the provision of psychosocial support. Screening is defined as the use of tests that can be applied rapidly across defined target groups to identify unrecognized disease or precursors to potential disease. Evidence shows that screening programs for breast, cervical, and colorectal cancers can be successful in reducing morbidity and mortality rates (Alberta Health Services Screening Programs, 2015). Organized screening programs can be an effective strategy to encourage population-wide participation, which is essential for maximizing the benefits of screening.

The Alberta Cervical Cancer Screening Program (ACCSP) supports this strategy through a collaborative, province-wide cancer screening program involving clients, primary health-care providers, laboratories, health zone leaders, and other key stakeholders, including the College of Registered Nurses of Alberta (CRNA)¹.

Screening participation rates for cervical cancer in Alberta have been between 58% and 67% for women who have had cervical cancer screening at least every three years from 2015-2017, while the provincial target is 80%. A priority for the ACCSP is to increase access to and participation in cervical cancer screening, especially for patients who are under-screened or never screened. Over 90% of cervical cancers can be cured when found and treated early.

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to guide and provide support to registered nurses (RNs) performing cervical cancer screening in Alberta.

¹ CARNA is operating as the College of Registered Nurses of Alberta (CRNA).

Position

RNs have the knowledge, skill, expertise, and capacity to take a leadership role in population-based cervical cancer screening. RNs provide care to populations as well as support primary health care and person-centered care across the continuum of health-care experiences and services (CARNA, 2011). They have a strong foundation in nursing theory, health and sciences, humanities, research, critical inquiry, and ethics. RNs are prepared to practice safely, competently, compassionately, and ethically

- in situations of health and illness;
- with all people across the lifespan;
- with the following possible recipients of care: individuals, families, groups, communities, and populations; and
- across diverse practice settings.

RNs understand the role of primary health care and the significance of the determinants of health for population health. RNs are well situated to have a role in reducing the incidence and mortality from cervical cancer through enhanced prevention, early detection, and early referral for treatment of precursor conditions.

Requirements for Cervical Cancer Screening in Alberta

RNs providing cervical cancer screening in Alberta are accountable and responsible for following these requirements

- follow all current legislation, regulations, standards, and guidelines related to RN practice and cervical cancer screening;
- follow the provincial cervical cancer screening clinical practice guideline;
- practice safely, competently, and ethically;
- adhere to policies and processes in their practice setting;
- use evidence-based rationale for decision-making;
- achieve the needed initial and ongoing competencies for cervical cancer screening through clinical experience and mentorship by:
 - completing the required *ACCSP Cervical Cancer Screening Learning Module for Registered Nurses (2020)* and
 - continually acquiring and applying knowledge as well as maintaining skill in cervical cancer screening;
- perform the appropriate client assessment and decision-making regarding cervical cancer screening and treatment to ensure safe and ethical care;

- ensure that nursing care is provided with the client's informed consent;
- ensure and establish follow-up processes for cervical cancer screening results with clients, including
 - ensuring a report is received for each screening test submitted,
 - ensuring every screening report is reviewed by the RN and follow-up action is determined,
 - forwarding a copy of the results to the client's primary health-care provider (with consent),
 - formulating a plan if the RN is not able to personally attend to the follow-up of screening results, and
 - providing an appropriate response, follow-up, and coordination of care for critical results;
- consult with and/or refer clients to other health-care providers at any point in the care continuum when the client's health-care needs require the care of another health-care professional;
- clearly document the assessment, screening, nursing interventions, and referrals made;
- ensure clients receiving care are provided with the information and education needed to make informed decisions about cervical cancer screening and the required care in an open, accurate, understandable, and transparent manner;
- participate in required and relevant provincial lab reporting and quality assurance programs;
- engage and collaborate with the client, significant others, community partners, and other members of the health-care team regarding activities of care planning, implementation, and evaluation of cervical cancer screening; and
- advocate for and with clients in relation to therapeutic intervention, health care access, the health-care system, and policy decisions that affect cervical health.

Professional Liability Protection

Liability protection for interprofessional teams is important for supporting interprofessional collaboration in cervical cancer screening. The Canadian Nurses Protective Society (CNPS) offers legal advice, risk-management services, legal assistance, and professional liability protection related to nursing practice. All RNs with active practice permits providing professional nursing services have CNPS liability protection and access to services. For more information about professional liability protection for the RN involved in cervical cancer screening, please consult with CNPS (1-800-267-3390).

References

Alberta Health Services. (2020). *ACCSP Cervical Cancer Screening Learning Module for Registered Nurses*. Calgary, AB: Screening Programs. Retrieved from https://screeningforlife.ca/for-health-providers/cervical-screeninginformation/#rn_pap_module_resources.

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