



*Advancing Excellence*

Statement to  
The Subcommittee on Public Health  
Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee

Hearing on  
Women's Health Issues

April 25, 2002

Submitted by  
College of American Pathologists

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The College of American Pathologists (CAP) is pleased to submit this statement for the record of the Subcommittee on Public Health's hearing on women's health issues. The College is a medical specialty society representing more than 16,000 board-certified physicians who practice clinical or anatomic pathology, or both, in community hospitals, independent clinical laboratories, academic medical centers and federal and state health facilities.

The College has long advocated that, in general, all women who are or have been sexually active, or have reached 18 years of age, should have an annual Pap test and pelvic examination. Access to annual screening Pap tests—especially for women in the Medicare program—is essential to improving the health of America's women. Legislation now in the Senate, the "Providing Annual Pap Tests to Save Women's Lives Act of 2001" (S. 258), would provide such a benefit and the College calls on Congress to pass this important bill.

No cancer screening test in medical history has proved as effective for early detection of cancer as the Pap test. Since the introduction of the Pap test shortly after World War II, death rates from cervical cancer have decreased 70 percent in the United States. But despite the test's unparalleled record of success, thousands of American women still fail to have an annual Pap examination. It is sad to note that of those women who die of cervical cancer, 80 percent had not had a Pap test in the five years preceding their deaths, studies show. The benefits of annual Pap tests are clear: A 1999 report from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), titled "Evaluation of Cervical Cytology," showed that the lifetime number of cervical cancer cases decreases from 506 to 109 in a cohort of 100,000 women with annual Pap test screenings and cervical cancer deaths decrease from 116 to 21 with annual Pap tests. The report concluded that annual Pap tests could result in 65 percent fewer cervical cancer deaths compared with screenings once every two years.

Access to annual Pap tests is particularly important to women in the Medicare program. The 1999 AHRQ report revealed that 40 percent to 50 percent of all women who die of cervical cancer are older than 65. But Medicare provides annual screening Pap test coverage only for women defined by the program as being at "high risk" of cervical cancer.

Recognizing the limitations of Medicare's coverage policy and the importance of annual Pap tests, the College has called for annual screening Pap test coverage under Medicare. Congress responded by passing the "Medicare, Medicaid and S-CHIP Benefits Improvement and Protection Act of 2000" (BIPA), which, last year, improved Medicare's coverage of Pap tests and pelvic and clinical breast examinations from once every three years to once every two years for all women in the program. While BIPA did much to expand Medicare access to the Pap test, it fell short of ensuring that all women beneficiaries have access to the test on an annual basis.

Last year, Sens. Olympia Snowe and Blanche Lincoln introduced the Providing Annual Pap Tests to Save Women's Lives Act of 2001, which would amend the biennial coverage under BIPA and require Medicare to cover screening Pap tests annually. Twenty-five co-sponsors—including all 13 women senators—have joined Sens. Snowe and Lincoln in support of this important bill. The College thanks the members of this subcommittee and others in the Senate who stand behind S. 258.

In light of the convincing data on the vital role annual Pap tests play in preventive care and women's health and the test's importance to America's older women, the College urges enactment of S. 258, the Providing Annual Pap Tests to Save Women's Lives Act of 2001.

The College thanks the subcommittee for the opportunity to present its views on this important issue and offers its support and continued assistance as Congress works to improve women's health.