Troubleshooting
in
smear taking

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ICSP Irish Cervical Screening Programme
- National Study Day -
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You will be better prepared to manage difficulties that may arise when taking smears
Share a difficult smeartaking experience with your neighbour
Difficulties

- Anxious tense woman
- Cannot find the cervix
- Vaginal discharge
- Sexual issues
- Disability
- Communication barriers
Take Stock

- Take full control
- Explain difficulties to the patient
- Be decisive
- Allay fears
- Relax and take your time
Helping the woman to relax

- Advise woman that the smear test can be done in a few minutes
- Would she like a friend with her?
- Deep breathing may help
- Give her control - tell her you will stop if she asks you at anytime
Patient Anxiety

Find out woman's particular fears

- procedure uncomfortable pain e.g. arthritis, find alternate position
- previous experience
- ask if she would like you to talk her through the steps of the procedure as you are doing them
Upset during procedure

- Smeartaker’s duty to stop procedure
- Calm patient
- Give more time
- Avoid deferring test if possible
- Anxiolytic prior to procedure if no contra indications
When you cannot find the cervix!

- Patient become more anxious
- Pelvic floor muscles contract
- The more difficulty to locate cervix the longer the procedure takes
- **The smear taker becomes flustered!**
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What can I do?

- Get the patient to lie flat
  - Remove pillow
  - Flatten couch

- Elevate the pelvis
  - Folded towel under gluteal region
  - Patient hands (fisted) under gluteal region

- Does this woman still have her cervix?

- PV internal examination locate cervix
  - Anteverted
  - Retroverted
It’s there but I can’t see it!

- **Flaccid walls of vagina**
  - Use larger speculum, wider, without causing discomfort
  - Cut glove, at top of thumb finger and place over closed speculum, keeps walls of vagina back and not falling into speculum
  - Let rest of glove hang out....so that you can pull it out!

- **Left lateral position on couch**
  - With full explanation to patient
  - With full informed consent of patient
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It’s there but far away!

Speculum too short

- Gently try next size until appropriate size has been sourced

- Highlights importance of well prepared trolley with different size specula arranged on trolley
I can see it but I can’t inspect it!

Excess mucous

- Request patient to attend mid cycle to avoid menses/blood interfering with specimen

- Use back of broom, rotate at outer edge cervix and remove mucous

- Rotate broom & carry out procedure
Vaginal discharge

- Mucous is common - proceed with smear test

- Discharge is less common (*it may be profuse, smelly, discoloured yellow or green, bloodstained, frothy*) - if you proceed to smear, remember to take any swabs after the smear test has been taken

- Contact bleeding – consider Chlamydia
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What you might find along the way!

Medical clinical signs

- Rash, may be sore or itch

- Infection, may be discharge, warts, pubic lice, ulcerated area

- Incidental finding, psoriasis, alopecia etc.

- arrange full consultation as appropriate
Know what to expect

Variations

- Hymen intact
- Bartholans cysts
- Post operative scars- episiotomy
- Vaginal scarring for other reasons
- Female genital cutting
- Narrow introitus
- Long labia
Sensitive Issues

- Virgin
  - Discuss
  - Patient to be fully informed
  - If hymen intact, do not proceed

- Vaginismus
  - Discuss
  - Counselling
  - Fertility issues
  - Management

- Female Genital Cutting
  - Awareness
  - Sensitivity
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Communication difficulties

- Foreign language – interpreter formal/informal
- Medical jargon
- Complicated explanations
- Unclear messages

- Keep it simple (check understanding)
- Keep it consistent
Disability

All eligible women should be offered a smear test

• Physical
• Intellectual
• Psychiatric

Information and Consent
Social Inclusion

- This programme is for all women between 25 and 60 years

- The challenge for us is to include all women who require cervical screening
How can ICSP support you?

- Patient literature
- Pictorial leaflet
- Desktop *Terminology-Made-Simple* aid
- Smeartaker Training and Mentoring
- Clinical Updates
- Website [www.icsp.ie](http://www.icsp.ie)
- Information Line
- Resource Manual
End

Thank you