

Brief Guidance Document on the Appropriate Use of Human Papillomavirus Testing Issued by the Cytology Education and Technology Consortium

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In this issue of *Cancer Cytopathology*, the Cytology Education and Technology Consortium (CETC) has published a brief statement regarding the appropriate use of tests approved by the US Food and Drug Administration for human papillomavirus (HPV) in the context of cervical cancer screening and the workup of abnormal cervical cytology.¹ Screening² and practice guidelines have been published by the American Cancer Society, the National Comprehensive Cancer Network,³ and the American Society of Colposcopy and Cervical Pathology (ASCCP),⁴ with the hope of promoting consistency and evidence-based practices in the screening and management of cervical cancer.

Despite the widespread dissemination and availability of these guidelines, published studies and anecdotal reports have indicated a widespread lack of compliance, usually in the form of overuse of the test. A recent College of American Pathologists survey of HPV test utilization found that approximately 58% of laboratories responding to the survey offered HPV testing in combinations other than those recommended by the ASCCP, and 45% offered low-risk HPV testing despite the lack of evidence supporting its use.⁵ Saraiya et al found that 50% to 60% of providers used HPV testing for nonrecommended reasons, and up to two-thirds of providers who usually or always used HPV testing used it in the management of patients with cytologic findings of low-grade squamous intraepithelial lesion (LSIL) or higher, which is contrary to the guidelines except for postmenopausal women with LSIL.⁶ Among the possible reasons for the excessive ordering of HPV tests are a lack of familiarity with the specifics of the guidelines, fear of litigation in the case of a bad clinical outcome if HPV testing had not been ordered, a lack of familiarity with the potential morbidity associated with excessive testing, and the opinion that the high sensitivity of the HPV test trumps any deleterious effects of excessive testing. The CETC statement provides a brief, easy-to-read synopsis of

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the relevant ASCCP practice guidelines regarding the use of HPV testing. The statement can be printed and kept in a handy location or bookmarked in a Web browser for ready reference. As medical practice, including the practice of pathology, becomes increasingly evidence based, the easy availability of increasingly complex algorithms facilitates optimal practice.

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