

Program ROSE (Removing Obstacles to cervical ScrEening)- empowering women to eliminate cervical cancer

Mother. Sister. Wife. Friend. Colleague. Daughter. We can all appreciate the importance of the women in our lives. We can further appreciate the importance of doing everything we can to protect their health and wellness. One such area that requires direct attention is screening and prevention of cervical cancer.

Screening for cervical cancer is typically done through Pap Smear, with subsequent analysis of collected cells for cellular changes indicative of cancer. Pap smears can be often uncomfortable, painful and/or inconvenient, such that many women do not receive the optimal cadence for screening. In Malaysia, this is no different, where only 1 in 4 women receive regular Pap Smears. Compounding this issue is that results are often delayed for more than 3 months and many not linked to care.

Program ROSE (Removing Obstacles to cervical ScrEening) sought to shift the standard of care for cervical cancer screening to a self-swab method for Human Papillomavirus (HPV) screening, as 99% of cervical cancers are caused by high-risk HPV. This swab methodology not only identifies high-risk HPV strains but empowers women in a culturally sensitive way and requires less frequent follow-up, with improved diagnostic accuracy.

By combining self-swab collection with digital follow-up technology, Program ROSE has been able to provide improved access to high quality, while preserving the privacy and dignity of these women. To date, >22,000 women have been screening through Program ROSE (from 2018-Feb 2023). Of them 5.6% have screened positive for HPV, with 91% of those women being linked to care. Importantly, 4 cases of previously unidentified, early-stage cancers and 194 women with precancers were identified and linked to the appropriate care.

Program ROSE has also helped to tackle the stigma associated with HPV testing, which in turn has further helped to increase screening efforts. Iffah Amin, Staff Nurse at University Malaya Medical Centre, shares that “many patients think that HPV is STD. They feel shameful about it, and some will even blame their partners for having extramarital affairs. Proper messaging and education is foundational for Program ROSE to help everyone understand that HPV is common and that testing positive does not mean they have done anything wrong. It’s a great start to normalizing HPV testing.”

The positive impact that Program has had and will continue to have on the health and wellness of Malaysian women will be felt for generations to come. For their efforts and outcomes, Program ROSE has been awarded the Top Global Honor of 2022 UNIVANTS of Healthcare Excellence Awards Winning Team. Congratulations to Yin Ling Woo, Founding Trustee and Medical Technical Advisor, ROSE Foundation Marion Saville, Professor of Laboratory Medicine and Trustee for the ROSE Foundation, Yit Lee Choo, CEO, ROSE Foundation, Adeeba Kamarulzaman, Chair, ROSE Foundation, Mun Li Yam, Operations Director, ROSE Foundation.

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