

Innovative Treatments for Women with Cervical Cancer

In 2020, more than 13,500 women were diagnosed with invasive cervical cancer cases in the United States, according to estimates from the [American Cancer Society](#). More than 4,200 women died of the disease.

While vaccinations against HPV can help prevent it, women who have advanced cervical cancer may need comprehensive diagnostic, treatment, and support services, including access to unique clinical trials.

“Every year, thousands of women are diagnosed with invasive cervical cancers,” says [Lorraine Portelance, M.D.](#), a radiation oncologist and vice-chair and director of the Clinical Research Program at Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center. “Fortunately, cervical cancers can be prevented by vaccinations against the human papillomavirus (HPV), and today’s treatments are very effective against this life-threatening disease.” HPV also causes genital cancers and genital warts.

A new clinical trial combines therapies

As a National Cancer Institute (NCI) designated center, Sylvester offers leading-edge [cervical cancer care](#), including a clinical trial available nowhere else. [Marilyn Huang, M.D.](#), a gynecologic oncologist and director of Sylvester’s Translational Gynecologic Oncology Research, is leading an investigator-initiated phase 2 clinical trial enrolling patients with recurrent, persistent, or metastatic cervical cancer.

“Because the HPV virus drives cervical cancer, we are combining immune therapy with chemo-radiation treatment,” says Dr. Huang, who has also served as principal investigator on national collaborative group trials. “Our goal is to enroll 40 women

and track their responses to see the impact of this combination strategy on cervical cancer.”

When we diagnose a woman with early-stage cervical cancer, the first treatment is typically surgery, says Dr. Portelance. “But if the cancer has progressed beyond surgery, then radiation treatment, combined with chemotherapy as needed, can deliver good outcomes,” she says.

Dr. Portelance and her team use magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to identify the tumor's size and location so that it can be targeted precisely with intensity-modulated radiation therapy, [proton therapy](#), or [brachytherapy](#). “Our advanced MRI-guided technology lets us focus directly on the tumor, providing better outcomes with less damage to surrounding tissues and a higher quality of life after treatment.”

The best prevention is the HPV vaccine

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that all boys and girls get the HPV vaccine as early as age 11, even [before the onset of puberty or sexual activity](#). The CDC also recommends that women over age 30 have an annual Pap smear screening to detect cellular changes to the cervix caused by HPV.

“Since 2006, millions of women, as well as men, have been vaccinated against HPV,” says Dr. Huang. “It has proven to be remarkably effective in preventing cancers through the mid-40s.”

The HPV vaccination is readily available through Sylvester and the University of Miami Health System, and other primary care providers throughout our community.

Richard Westlund originally wrote this blog post for [Inventum](#).

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