



LET'S CHAT: cervical cancer? What's that?



A digital health awareness tool providing a personal and private conversation with a qualified medical professional, a person with lived experience and a care giver.

THE PROBLEM:

Women are dying needlessly from an invisible and insidious cancer. One woman is lost to cervical cancer every 2 minutes somewhere in the world. Africa is the hardest hit, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, where some 321 women are diagnosed each day with cervical cancer. Yet, the world has cost-effective means to prevent and treat this deadly disease when caught in time.

Women are simply in the dark and unaware of the potential to be infected by the human papilloma virus (HPV). It is not common knowledge that the infection shows no signs and takes decades to develop into a cancer. Women are not informed about the need for regular screening which is a simple and effective way to catch the virus before it causes damage. They also don't know that a vaccine can protect their young girls from being infected in the first place.

Cancer is still a taboo subject and cervical cancer is pretty much unfamiliar territory for a lot of women. It's a cancer, but it's also an infectious disease transmitted through sexual intercourse. Just asking about it may make some women feel vulnerable, experience shame or be fearful of the reaction of their spouse or family members.

REACHING EVERY WOMAN:

Getting the message to women everywhere is not that easy. There are taboos surrounding cancer and women don't talk openly about their reproductive health.

The 'Let's Chat' tool gives women a safe space to connect with other women and ask the questions they may not dare ask face-to-face. The conversational tool provides factual answers from a real person, be that a doctor, a nurse, a person who has experienced cervical cancer treatment or a care giver to explain the dangers and consequences of cervical cancer and how it can be prevented. The 'Let's Chat' tool has been developed by women, with women in mind. **'Let's Chat: Cervical Cancer' is making the invisible visible and understood.**

HOW IT WORKS:

A woman can ask things like: 'Will it hurt to get screened?' or 'What exactly does the doctor do to me for a 'Pap' smear test?' or 'What is the difference between an HPV test and a Pap smear?' or 'If my daughter gets the HPV vaccine people will think she's sexually active but she is not. How can I protect my daughter's health and her reputation?'

The digital conversational tool is enabled by AI technology using natural language processing to understand voice-based or text-based human conversations. The tool can distinguish between similar questions and provide the correct answer. The answer never changes – it's always a factual and accurate reply. But if someone asks: 'will it hurt' or 'is it painful?', the software recognizes that both questions are the same and provides the video recording that has been prepared as an answer. The conversation happens entirely through a video and provides a natural way of interaction with another person which builds trust.

PILOT PHASE:

The 'Let's Chat' cervical cancer digital health awareness tool has been designed by Soroptimist International Nairobi Central Club, Kenya with the support of Soroptimist International Dubai Club. The pilot is made possible thanks to a partnership with 'In The Room'. We expect this to be tested among 600 working women in a flower farm in Kenya in early May 2024. The web-based experience will expose the women to this tool which will be accessible on the Soroptimist website. They will be encouraged to use it and share it with other women in their community.

MEASURING SUCCESS & POTENTIAL ROLL OUT:

A pre- and post- usage survey will be conducted to assess the increase in knowledge and level of behavioral change to inform eventual modifications ahead of the roll out.

If successful, Soroptimists Dubai plans to work with Soroptimist International Africa Federation (SIAF) in rolling out the pilot program by developing both an English and French tool that Clubs can personalize with 'conversationalists' from their own country and host their own experiences on their national websites. The development and web hosting are on a cost-basis through the technology provider 'In The Room' and will require a regular source of funding. The intention is to secure funding through the Soroptimist network and prospective philanthropic partners with Clubs invited to apply for access to the tool on the basis of a degressive model that will subsidize the initial costs in the first two years.

WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

The aim is to spread awareness about the need for screening and vaccination with the objective to increase knowledge, dispel myths and ultimately increase the uptake of both preventative methods: screening and vaccination. This is in line with the WHO global strategy for the elimination of cervical cancer by 2030 and provides an instrumental awareness raising tool that can be scaled up under the SIAF partnership with the United Nations Health4Life Fund at the country grassroots level across Africa.

Achieving success, together with other partners, will mean we have reached hundreds of thousands of women and girls across twenty-five countries in Africa.

