

Annual Pelvic Exams Questioned

But Not By DES Daughters

Some in the medical community have lost faith in the value of annual pelvic exams for detecting cervical cancer in women who have no symptoms and who are at average risk for the disease. That takes DES Daughters out of the equation with our increased risk not only for clear cell adenocarcinoma (CCA) of the cervix, but also of the vagina.

The issue arose in July when the American College of Physicians released what has become a controversial new guideline stating pelvic exams are unnecessary for most women. This is in contrast to the screening guidelines of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), which call for annual pelvic exams (but not yearly Pap smears – DES Daughters excepted).

The debate is expected to continue into the foreseeable future, so here's help in defining terms.

- A pelvic exam involves feet into the stirrups so the doctor can first look at the genitals for anything unusual before inserting the speculum. Then a visual inspection is done of the vagina and cervix, followed by the doctor using a gloved hand pressing from the inside and with the other hand on the abdomen pushing down to feel for unusual masses on the ovaries and uterus. A similar palpation is done in the rectum to look for tenderness or growths.
- A DES Daughter pelvic exam also includes specific feeling (palpating) around the surface of the vagina to detect any growths that could be CCA. This extra component of the

screening is especially important.

- During the pelvic exam, a Pap smear may also be done. It entails cervical cells being gently scraped off the cervix with a tool similar to a Q-tip. The specimen is sent to a lab for analysis.
- A DES Daughter Pap smear scrapes cells from both the cervix and the vagina. After hysterectomy DES Daughters should still have Paps done with cells taken from the vagina.

Women can have just a pelvic exam or a pelvic exam coupled with a Pap screening. It's important when scheduling to be specific about what you want, so you know what you are getting.

DES Daughter guidelines continue to call for both a pelvic exam and a Pap smear every year.