

# Program for the Control of Cervical Cancer in Peru<sup>1</sup>

Cancer of the cervix uteri is the most common malignant neoplasm in Peru. Information on the epidemiologic trends of this cancer and its frequency are available only from the capital, as there is no national cancer registry. According to statistics from the National Institute of Neoplastic Diseases in Lima (which receives patients referred from various parts of the country), in the period 1952–1991 cervical cancer represented 44.6% of all cases treated. Likewise, data from the Anti-Cancer League (a private institution dedicated to campaigns for the prevention and early detection of cancer in asymptomatic populations at high risk) reveal that 95.9% of the 1 403 cancers of the genital organs in 500 445 women examined between 1953 and 1994 were of the uterine cervix. In addition, the percentage of advanced-stage cervical neoplasms detected during that period ranged between 80% and 86%. Despite these discouraging statistics, a recent report from the Maes-Heller Center for Research on Cancer showed a slight decline in the incidence of this type of cancer in the period 1970–1980.

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It has not yet been possible to initiate a cervical cancer screening program to serve Lima and the provinces of Peru. A report from the Ministry of Health indicates that reproductive health care for women has been directly tied to pregnancy, birth, and post partum care, with very little attention being given to providing women access to services for the prevention or alleviation of various gynecological problems that may adversely affect their health. The scarcity of funds provided for that specific purpose has made it impossible to construct a centralized national program for the control of cervical cancer. Activities to that end have been limited to performance of Pap smears in family planning and maternity services and in comprehensive health care campaigns.

With the creation of the new Reproductive Health and Family Planning Program, which will become operational by the year 2000, the Ministry of Health has proposed achievement of the goal that at least 30% of Peruvian women of reproductive age will receive an annual Pap smear. Technical cooperation from PAHO/WHO in this field has been limited thus far, primarily because the majority of its support in the area of reproductive health has been aimed at reducing maternal mortality and promoting family planning.

