



Faces of **Hope**



TOGETHER
for health

Hannah

Scaling Up Screening Against Cervical Cancer

Cervical cancer is a preventable disease, and yet it kills an estimated 311,000 women worldwide every year. Most cervical cancer fatalities globally occur in low- or middle-income countries like Kenya and India, where access to information and services is scarce.

The stories here represent the experiences of women in Kenya and India fighting cervical cancer, and the advocates and medical professionals who work to prevent needless suffering and death from the disease.

Nearly all cases of cervical cancer are caused by a very common sexually transmitted infection called human papillomavirus (HPV). Cervical cancer can be prevented with safe and effective vaccines against HPV, and also with simple, inexpensive screening and on-the-spot treatment for pre-cancerous lesions caused by the HPV virus – an approach known as “screen-and-treat.”

TogetHER, an international partnership, is working to increase funding and political will to make HPV vaccination and screen-and-treat affordable and accessible everywhere. TogetHER ensures that women who are vulnerable to cervical cancer are not left behind in low- and middle-income countries. By scaling up access to the tools already available, it is possible to end cervical cancer deaths around the world.

Portions of this work were jointly produced by TogetHER and the American Cancer Society.® Thank you to the following organizations & individuals for making this work possible:

- Dr. Michael Chung, Co-founder of the Coptic Hope Center for Infectious Diseases
- Aga Khan University East Africa
- Treatment, Research, and Expert Education (TREE)
- The Cancer Foundation of India
- Cancer Awareness, Prevention And Early Detection (CAPED) Trust – India



In a dusty alley of a low-income Nairobi suburb, medical practitioner Hannah Wambui runs a tiny clinic with a staff of six that provides women's health services.

Many of Hannah's clients show early signs of developing cervical cancer.

“When they come to the clinic and need services, they are unable to pay, but you can't let them go,” Hannah said of many of Gawa's patients. In response, the clinic hosts “Open Days” when services are provided for free. For many patients visiting the clinic during an Open Day, it is their first time accessing cervical cancer prevention services.

Volunteers like Mary Mbugua are a critical link between the women of her community and Gawa Medical Center. Mary visits the community's market areas, talking to women about HPV and cervical cancer, and reassuring them that screening is a simple, painless process that can save their lives. “I work to help the community because I live with them,” she said, “and I know their problems. When I tell them about what we can do, they appreciate it.”

“I know the work we are doing here is making a positive outcome,” Hannah said about the screen-and-treat offerings at Gawa Medical Center.

“When [women] come here and we check them and find they are sick, we can treat them. They tell the others to come to be checked, and if they are sick, they too are treated.”



Jagwati Building Awareness to Address Cervical Cancer

Every morning, 30-year-old Jagwati prepares to meet with the women of Arua, her village in Haryana state. Jagwati was trained by the nonprofit organization Cancer Awareness, Prevention and Early Detection (CAPED) Trust to help educate and motivate women about the importance of screening for cervical cancer and, if needed, timely treatment of pre-cancers.

"During my training, I was told that this cancer is one that can be prevented if it's screened for and detected early or at pre-cancer stage," she said. "So, I went from door to door to make every effort to convince women that the screening test is safe, secure, and critical for their health."

Jagwati attributes a big part of her success as a community health worker to the availability of services in the village, "It is important that these kind of screening camps be held regularly at the village level itself, as it becomes easier to bring women to a venue close to their homes rather than needing to travel."

With this access and comprehensive information, Jagwati knows the women of Arua can combat cervical cancer together. "Once rural women find support in each other and are determined to take care of their health, then it's easy to mobilize them to act as a strong collective group that can do anything."

Rose Cervical Cancer's Impact on Women and Families

Rose Cheido, a 48-year-old single mother in Kenya, was first diagnosed with cancer in 2013—she beat it once, only to have it return in 2018.. "The treatment was not easy," said Rose of her radiotherapy and chemotherapy treatments. "I didn't have a job, and the family had to support me. So, it was a struggle."

"Chances of really recovering and being the same are not very easy...You may not have the same strength you used to have before," said Rose. So despite her own challenges, after one year of treatment for cervical cancer she devoted her life to helping women in her situation. As a patient advocate, she has guided women through an extended, frightening experience and supported them at times when no one else will.

In addition to the logistical barriers to treatment and recovery—including cost, transportation and housing—women with cervical cancer can suffer from trauma, fear, stigma, and other challenges. Even after their treatment is complete, survivors can experience significant social, physical, and financial problems.

"I would share with the patients...my story, and I would give them hope through my story. I would tell them it's very possible to recover, but of course you also have to play a role because you are the first doctor of yourself," Rose said. "My message to the women in the world would be that prevention is better than cure, and early detection saves lives."

Sadly, Rose lost her battle against cervical cancer early 2019. Her efforts to educate and support women saved lives and her loss was deeply felt throughout the cervical cancer community. Her memory continues to motivate the tireless work of advocates across the world.





Savitha & Sanjna

Making an Informed Choice to Prevent Cervical Cancer

Savitha Mallapa is a mother to two teenagers. When she learned that an HPV vaccine might protect her daughter from cancer, she wanted to know more.

"It first came up in an extended family conversation, as we've got a lot of teenagers at home," said Savitha.

The HPV vaccine was not widely available in Bengaluru where Savitha lives, and many medical professionals were either unaware of the vaccine or lacked the information Savitha sought. So she reached out to a trusted friend working in cancer prevention. That's how she learned that the HPV vaccine is highly effective and safe.

"I found out that the HPV vaccine not only prevents cervical cancer, but can help prevent 5 other types of cancers too," she pointed out.

She shared the information with her daughter who was immediately supportive.

"It was a no brainer for me," says young Sanjna. "It's like any other vaccination honestly, and since we already take a bunch of these as kids why would I be afraid of another one that actually protects me from something as serious as cervical cancer."

Over a period of six months, Sanjna received two injections of the HPV vaccine. She experienced no side effects.

Today, Savitha and Sanjna raise awareness with others about the importance of vaccination. As Savitha shared, "Our biggest challenge in making a decision about this was getting accurate information...and I feel it's our responsibility that once we've got access to the information, we must share it with others."

Lakshmi

Saving a Life with
Screen & Treat

"I run this house and take care of everything, so I have to stay healthy," says 48-year-old Lakshmi.

A year ago, Lakshmi was experiencing pelvic pain, but struggled to consult a doctor due to embarrassment and the cost of travel to a clinic.

Until one day, a free cervical cancer screening camp was set up by Cancer Awareness Prevention and Early Detection (CAPED) Trust. Lakshmi spoke with a CAPED volunteer who explained the urgency of getting tested, especially for women in her age group. She decided to seek services.

Lakshmi's test found cervical pre-cancer. She remembers her reaction upon receiving the results. "When they told me I had cervical pre-cancer, I got very anxious for my family. I was afraid I was going to die," she said.

CAPED linked Lakshmi to treatment services at a hospital in Delhi. Lakshmi was hesitant to go. "I was quite nervous as I had never gone to a hospital before, but my daughter accompanied me and supported me," she explained.

With a simple treatment that took minutes, Lakshmi's pre-cancer was eliminated.

Today she shares important words for others, "I urge all women not to be ashamed when it comes to our health issues. Talk about it with someone before it's too late. If we don't get checked on time...then we will not be here for our family when they need us. It's a matter of life and death."



Dr. Anne Ng'ang'a

Working Towards
Cervical Cancer
Elimination



Dr. Anne Ng'ang'a is the head of the national cancer control program in the Kenya Ministry of Health. She implements the national cancer control strategy, which has a strong focus on cancer prevention.

In 2019, Kenya launched a nationwide HPV vaccination campaign to prevent cervical cancers and save lives. As more girls are vaccinated and increasingly fewer girls are infected with HPV over time, it will become possible to eliminate cervical cancer in Kenya.

"Cervical cancer is one of those cancers that we can actually prevent," said Dr. Ng'ang'a, who is working to make sure the HPV vaccine is recognized as a cancer prevention measure.

Together with the Kenya Expanded Program on Immunization (KEPI), the Ministry of Health's Department for Cancer Control made the HPV vaccine available to girls countrywide. Various cancer and civil society organizations also played a key role, mobilizing community members and sharing accurate and appropriate messaging around the vaccine's safety and effectiveness. These efforts will boost awareness and create demand and support for the vaccine.

"There's a global call to end cervical cancer, so really it is upon us to... accept that call and do something about it," noted Dr. Ng'ang'a. "It's important for all communities, all governments to come together and ensure that we start to see an end to cervical cancer, because I believe it is doable."

About TogetHER

TogetHER is 'cutting through the clutter' of competing health priorities by focusing 100% on one issue – cervical cancer. We are the catalyst for health care providers, advocates, funders, and policymakers to focus on preventing and treating cervical cancer.

We are coordinating partners, raising much-needed funds to provide services to women, and ensuring that cervical cancer receives needed attention to end needless deaths. Our priorities include:

- Access to the HPV vaccine for girls
- Improved access to cervical cancer screening and treatment for women
- Inclusion of cervical cancer screening in women's health services
- Raising funds from traditional and new supporters, educating them on cervical cancer, and working with them to leverage new funds for advocacy and implementation
- Building coalitions to pilot and evaluate new programs and technologies that will allow us to reach more girls and women

TogetHER works with our members to fund and implement evidence-based programs that reflect our shared vision to end cervical cancer deaths.



For more information, email info@togetherforhealth.org or visit www.togetherforhealth.org.





Cervical cancer is a preventable disease. With increased resources for vaccination and screen-and-treat, we can save women's lives.

Join TogetHER in envisioning a world where all women and girls have access to the effective tools already available to end cervical cancer deaths.