

OVERVIEW OF WOMEN'S HEALTH SKILLS COURSE

Dr Helena Wong Ern Ling

INTRODUCTION

This skills course aims to update practicing doctors on the knowledge and skills in women's health. In Singapore today, the life expectancy of females at birth is 81.3 years. Women are spending many of these years in menopause, with the accompanying medical conditions, such as osteoporosis, arising from the decline in serum estrogen levels. Osteoporosis can be prevented by adequate calcium and vitamin D intake and weight bearing exercises. Women at higher risk of osteoporosis should have their bone mineral density assessed. The problem of obesity is more common in women, especially those in the 50-59 age group. Prevention and treatment of obesity is best done by adopting and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Pregnancy in the older woman carries with it risks of perinatal complications and chromosomal abnormalities. Contraceptive advice is a necessary responsibility of the healthcare provider who manages mature women patients.

Women with one sexually transmitted infection are likely to have another. Hence it is essential to screen for others, especially the asymptomatic ones like HIV. Sexually transmitted infections in women increase the transmission of HIV. The screening of HIV in pregnant women has now become routine in Singapore, unless the woman opts out of the test. Sexually transmitted infections causing pelvic inflammatory disease and intra-abdominal adhesions can result in infertility, ectopic pregnancies and chronic pain. They can also result in adverse pregnancy outcomes and lower genital tract neoplasia. Early detection and treatment of these infections reduce the risks of these complications.

Breast cancer tops the list of top ten cancers affecting women in Singapore. Breast cancer has the best chance of being cured when detected early. All women should have regular breast examinations, and mammography should be routine after the age of forty years. Earlier mammography is done in women with a family history of breast cancer.

Prevention of gynaecological cancers includes reduction of risk factors. Tests like mammography and Pap smears aid in the early detection of malignant disease. With regular Pap smear screening, detection and removal of cervical intraepithelial neoplasia makes cervical cancer avoidable. When cervical cancer is detected early, it is curable. The diagnostic value of the Pap test is significantly affected by the correct sampling of a cervical smear with appropriate equipment. In view of the importance of the correct technique in performing Pap smears, a clinical attachment at the colposcopy clinic in KKH has been included in this skills course.

At present, CA-125 lacks sufficient specificity to be a suitable screening test when used in isolation. However, when combined with pelvic ultrasound in post-menopausal women, both can achieve high specificity (99.9%), sensitivity of 78.6%. CA-125 has been a clinical useful marker for predicting response to treatment, prognostication and detecting tumour recurrence.

COURSE OUTLINE AND CME POINTS

Like in the other skills courses, this skills course is made up of several components. You can choose to participate in one or more parts of it. These are described below. The CME points that will be awarded are also indicated below.

Components and CME Points

- Distance learning course – 6 units (see attached) – each unit 1 CME point
- 2 Seminars (2 CME points each)
- 1 Workshop (2 CME points)
- Clinical Attachment Session (Optional)
- Reading papers on Women's Health – read 5 out of 10 recommended journals.

Distance Learning Course

Unit 1 : Menopausal Health in Women (*Dr Khong Chit Chong*)

Unit 2 : HIV Infection and Other Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) in Women (*Dr Fong Kah Leng*)

Unit 3 : Breast Biopsies – When, Why and How (*AI/Prof Hong Ga Sze*)

Unit 4 : Reducing the Risk of Gynaecological Cancers (*Dr Tay Eng Hseon*)

Unit 5 : Cervical Cancer Prevention (*Dr Jeffrey Low Jen Hui*)

Unit 6 : Pap Smears: Techniques, Interpretation of Results and Management of Abnormal Results (*Dr Fong Kah Leng*)

COURSE TOPIC DETAILS

Unit 1: Menopausal Health in Women

- Risks of menopausal hormonal therapy: evidence from WHI studies
- Contraception in the perimenopausal years
- Osteoporosis
- Obesity

Unit 2: HIV Infection and Other Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) in Women

- Symptomatic STIs – “The visible STIs”
- Asymptomatic STIs – “The invisible STIs”
- HIV infection
- HIV in pregnancy
- Long-term sequelae of STIs in women

Unit 3: Breast Biopsies – When, Why and How

- Breast screening modalities
- Mammography
- Breast ultrasound
- When to biopsy
- Why biopsy
- How to biopsy

Unit 4: Reducing the Risk of Gynaecological Cancers

- Overview of gynaecological cancers: cervical, uterine and ovarian
- Risk and protective factors for gynaecological cancers
- Tumour markers – Usefulness and otherwise
- Primary prevention and screening for gynaecological cancers

Unit 5: Cervical Cancer Prevention

- Epidemiology of cervical cancer
- Natural history
- Current review for cervical cancer prevention
- Role of Pap test
- Refinement and newer technologies in cervical cancer screening
- Human papillomavirus (HPV) DNA testing
- CervicalScreen Singapore (CSS)

Unit 6: Pap Smears: Techniques, Interpretation of Results and Management of Abnormal Results

- Overview
- Methods of sample collection
- Technique of slide preparation
- What processes take place in the laboratory locally
- Interpretation of results
- Management of abnormal results

FACE-TO-FACE SESSIONS

Seminar 1: 14 January 2006

2.00pm – 4.00pm

Unit 1 : Menopausal Health in Women (*Dr Khong Chit Chong*)

Unit 2 : HIV Infection and Other Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) in Women (*Dr Fong Kah Leng*)

Unit 3 : Breast Biopsies – When, Why and How (*A/Prof Hong Ga Sze*)

Workshop 1: 14 January 2006

4.15pm – 6.15pm

- 2 Case Studies on Women's Health
- Hands-on Practice on Pap Smear Technique

Resource: Dr Quek Swee Chong

Seminar 2: 15 January 2006

2.00pm – 4.00pm

Unit 4 : Reducing the Risk of Gynaecological Cancers (*Dr Tay Eng Hseon*)

Unit 5 : Cervical Cancer Prevention (*Dr Jeffrey Low Jen Hui*)

Unit 6 : Pap Smears: Techniques, Interpretation of Results and Management of Abnormal Results (*Dr Fong Kah Leng*)

Workshop 2: 15 January 2006

4.15pm – 6.15pm

- Two Case Studies on Women's Health
- Hands-on Practice on Pap Smear Technique

Resource: Dr Quek Swee Chong