Screening for cervical cancer is an important part of ongoing ambulatory care for women, but it is far from the only service provided by McKinley Health Center clinicians during a well-woman exam. In March 2012, the U.S. Preventive Task Force recommended women age 21-65 have a pap test every three years. When screening for cervical cancer is not indicated due to interval since last screen, hysterectomy status, or age, McKinley clinicians can instead focus on other health care concerns that will be more valuable to women – instead of spending clinician and patient time on a health care service with limited benefit. For example:

- Young women can benefit from counseling on healthy diet, risky behaviors, family planning, and if they are sexually active, testing for sexually transmitted diseases. The focus for cervical cancer for this age group should be on primary prevention through HPV vaccination.
- Women of reproductive age will benefit from counseling and shared decision making on family planning, including support for consistent, effective use of their chosen method.
- Women in later reproductive years and perimenopausal women will benefit from counseling on the menopausal transition, osteoporosis prevention, and referral for mammography and colorectal cancer screening.
- Both women of reproductive age and postmenopausal women benefit from ongoing evaluation of continence and pelvic floor function, which can be essential to their health and functioning.

Pap tests will be done more often than every three years in women who have HIV, have a weakened immune system, have been exposed to DES before birth, or have had a LEEP procedure; these women should have a pap test at least once a year. Women who recently had an abnormal pap or cervical biopsy may need to be seen more frequently than once a year.

A well-women exam is not the same as a “pap smear.” Regular gynecological examinations are an essential part of any woman’s health care. Ideally, women should have a Women’s Health Exam before they begin sexual activity. All women should have their first Women’s Health Exam by age 21. If a woman detects any pain or menstrual irregularities, an earlier medical exam is also advised. McKinley Health Center is still recommending an annual Women’s Health Exam, with or without a Pap Test.

References

USPSTF, release March 2012: www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/uspstf/uspscerv.htm Announcement, March 14, 2012, ACOG:

If you are a registered University of Illinois student and you have questions or concerns, or need to make an appointment, please call: Dial-A-Nurse at 333-2700

If you are concerned about any difference in your treatment plan and the information in this handout, you are advised to contact your health care provider.

Visit the McKinley Health Center Web site at: http://www.mckinley.illinois.edu