Determining Whether a Mobile App and Website Improve Appropriate Pap Test Screening for Cervical Cancer

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What was the research about?

Pap tests screen for cervical cancer in women. Current guidelines recommend that women ages 21–29 get a Pap test once every three years because they are at low risk for cervical cancer. But many women get Pap tests more often. Having more tests can cause anxiety and lead to unneeded procedures.

In this study, the research team tested two ways to help clinics make sure women get Pap tests as recommended but not more often:

- **Clinician app.** Clinicians, such as doctors and nurses, received an app for their phones. The app helped clinicians figure out how often patients should get Pap tests based on guidelines and patient traits such as age.
- **Clinician app and patient website.** Clinicians received the app. Their clinics also received tablet computers with a website that had information for patients about when women should get Pap tests. Clinic staff asked patients to view the website in the waiting room.

The research team compared the rate of Pap tests per woman receiving care for clinics that used the app, the app plus the website, or neither.

What were the results?

During the study, the rate of Pap tests per woman didn't differ based on whether women received care at

a clinic that had the app, the app and the website, or neither.

When the research team compared the rate of Pap tests before and after the study started, the clinics that got both the app and the website had more of a decrease than clinics with the app only or clinics with neither.

Who was in the study?

The study included claims for 84,823 women who received care at 1 of 42 women's health clinics in Southern California. Of these women, 81 percent were Latina; 8 percent were white, 5 percent were Asian or Pacific Islander, 4 percent were black, and 2 percent were other races. Spanish was the primary language for 61 percent of women; English was the primary language for 34 percent; and 6 percent spoke another language. The average age was 26.

What did the research team do?

The research team assigned 14 clinics by chance to use either the app or the app plus the website for 18 months. Then the team compared these 14 clinics with 28 clinics that didn't have the app or website.

The research team looked at how many Pap tests women received in the 18 months before and the 18 months during the study.

Members of advocacy organizations helped create the patient education website and recruit clinics.

What were the limits of the study?

The research team followed patients for only 18 months. Results may have differed if the study tracked patients for longer. The team also couldn't track which clinics used the app or website. Some clinics may not have used the app or website as much as others.

Future studies could track Pap test rates for longer and look at app and website use by clinic.

How can people use the results?

Clinics can use the results when considering ways to help women get Pap tests as recommended.

To learn more about this project, visit www.pcori.org/Moscicki294.