International Symposium—Meet the Experts:
3. Oncology
Improving survival and quality of life of gynecologic cancer patients

3) The New Era of Cervical Cancer Control:
Current Knowledge and Perspective

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The Pap smear has transformed cervical cancer from a leading killer to a rare disease but the poorest regions of the world still bear the brunt of the disease. Cervical cancer screening is now entering a new era where we will be measuring the causal viral infection, with its associated carcinogenic HPV types rather than pleomorphic cellular changes. While great progress is being made in developed countries, we must not forget that mortality due to cervical cancer remains alarmingly high among women in low-resource settings.

This twenty-five years odyssey of discovery had its start with the isolation of the disease causing HPV, which was soon followed by the accumulation of epidemiological data demonstrating the major risk of cervical cancer attributed to high-risk HPV types and their oncogenic role in host cells. This was soon followed by the evidence establishing HPV16 and 18 as the leading candidates in the pathogenesis of cervical neoplasia.

HPV test results predict the risk of cervical cancer and its precursors better and longer than cytological abnormalities. New HPV screening strategies will require longer screening intervals which have a greatest potential for reduction in cervical cancer rates in low resources countries.

Compelling evidence for another major concept has emerged last years: cervical HPV infection and associated cervical cancer can be prevented by vaccination. The demonstrated effectiveness of HPV vaccine opens a new era of great hopes, which will encompass new strategies for cervical cancer prevention based on synergic association of widespread vaccination and simplified screening, in turn leading to a new standard of care with the extraordinary perspective of potential eradication of the disease within the coming years.