

## Abnormal Results in Cervical Cancer Screening May Trigger Symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Jena, 29 September - The World Mental Health Day is observed on 10 October every year in order to raise awareness of and educate people on mental health. This is also an opportunity for [oncgnostics GmbH](#). The company, which specialises in the diagnosis of cancer, wants to improve cervical cancer screenings. Among other things, the aim is to reduce unnecessarily high psychological stress for women with abnormal findings.

Current studies [1] show that symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder are not uncommon when performing cervical cancer screenings. 3,753 women were questioned in one of the largest online surveys on this topic to date. At least one abnormal finding was reported by about half of the women. Approximately a quarter of the women stated that they had been waiting for over a year after getting abnormal results. 28 percent of the women showed symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder at the time of the survey. In addition to avoidance behaviour, these symptoms include frequent and uncontrollable preoccupation with unresolved, distressing questions and thoughts raised by deep emotional shocks (the so-called intrusion). Besides, overexcitation of the nervous system may occur (the so-called hyperarousal). Among other things, this leads to sleeping problems, startlement or irritability.

### What does an abnormal finding in cervical cancer screening mean?

As part of the annual cancer screening, the treating gynaecologist takes a smear from the cervix and the uterine orifice, which is analysed for cellular changes. If there are any abnormalities, the patient is informed and goes through the so-called 'watchful waiting' phase. Since most changes heal on their own without causing cancer, the required Pap and HPV tests are repeated at regular intervals.

The development of cervical cancer happens via preliminary stages and often very slowly. It may take years before confirming whether an affected woman has cancer. Physically healthy women are also at risk of becoming mentally ill due to this approach, which is characterised by uncertainty. This uncertainty may cause fear of cancer or affect family planning.

'Much more clarification is needed as to what abnormal results or a positive HPV test actually mean. Besides, we need a substantially more precise diagnosis, in order not to let psychological distress caused by unclear findings develop at all,' concludes Dr Martina Schmitz, Managing Director at oncgnostics GmbH and co-author of the study.

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[1] M. Jentschke, R. Lehmann, N. Drews, A. Hansel, M. Schmitz, P. Hillemanns (2020): Psychological distress in cervical cancer screening: results from a German online survey. In: Archives of Gynecology and Obstetrics. 3/2020:699–705

## World Mental Health Day

The international day was organised in 1992 by the World Federation for Mental Health (WFMH), to raise awareness of mental health and the needs of people with mental disorders. Physical and mental health go hand in hand. Nevertheless, mental disorders often carry the stigma of being self-inflicted, whereas physical illnesses are generally attributed to external causes.

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<sup>1</sup> M. Jentschke, R. Lehmann, N. Drews, A. Hansel, M. Schmitz, P. Hillemanns (2020): Psychological distress in cervical cancer screening: results from a German online survey. In: Archives of Gynecology and Obstetrics. 3/2020:699–705

### **About oncnostics GmbH:**

Oncnostics GmbH, based in Jena, specialises in the early detection of cancer. Its tests detect changes that are characteristic of the DNA of cancer cells. Founded in 2012, the company launched GynTect in 2015. As part of early detection of cervical cancer, the test clarifies whether cervical cancer or precursors thereof are already present. Oncnostics GmbH also conducts research into clarification tests for other types of cancer. Detailed information is available at [www.oncnostics.com](http://www.oncnostics.com).

**Graphics and information** on the study conducted: [www.oncnostics.com/downloads](http://www.oncnostics.com/downloads)

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