

# *North Carolina Women's Hospital*

## **Dysplasia and what it means to you**

### **What is dysplasia?**

Dysplasia is the medical term for abnormal cells. Abnormal cells can grow on the genital (sex areas) and anus of women and men. There are three grades of abnormal cells; low, moderate and high grade. Low grade abnormal cells may go away on their own. Moderate and high grade abnormal cells are considered a higher risk because if they are not treated they may develop into cancer. Tests can tell which grade of abnormal cells you have.

### **What causes dysplasia?**

Dysplasia is caused by a sexually transmitted infection (STI) called Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) Once you've been exposed to HPV you are at risk for having abnormal cells grow on your sex areas and anus.

### **How is dysplasia detected?**

Dysplasia may be seen on the skin of your sex areas by a visual exam. A pap smear also detects these abnormal cells on your cervix and vagina.

### **How is dysplasia diagnosed?**

If your pap smear or physical examine suggests abnormal cells, you will need more tests to determine if you have them and what grade they are. A colposcopy (examination with magnification) exam is done and a tiny sample of tissue will be taken and tested for abnormal cells.

### **Is dysplasia treatable?**

Dysplasia is treatable. The results of your tests will determine the best way to treat you. Low grade abnormal cells may go away on their own. Moderate or high grade abnormal cells require treatment. As long as you have abnormal cells we want to see you every 6 months for close observation.

### **What is the treatment for dysplasia?**

The treatment for abnormal cells is to have them surgically removed. There is no medicine yet that will get rid of abnormal cells. There is a treatment for each area that the cells are on. Your health care provider will discuss these treatment options with you.

Treatment for abnormal cells is done in the clinic. It's an hour long appointment and the treatment usually only takes 15-20 minutes of that. You do not have to prepare in any way prior to the procedure. You can eat and dress normally but you must have a driver with you to drive you home afterwards. Ask for further information on the type of treatment that has been advised for you.

### **Health Care after a dysplasia diagnosis**

Learning you have abnormal cells can be surprising and scary. However, it is not life threatening. It is not cancer. It is something to remain aware of and get regular check-ups and treatment for.

- Keep yourself healthy as possible.
- Don't smoke. Smoking has been shown to increase the chance that abnormal cells will not go away and get worse.
- Get annual screening pap smears or every 6 months if you have abnormal cells.

Approved by NC Women's Hospital Patient Education Committee on December 18, 2007.