

## REAL-LIFE CASEBOOK

# My Pap smear SHOCK



Mum was a huge support

Amy wasn't worried when her Pap smear revealed abnormal cells on her cervix

It was February 2005 and my routine Pap smear had revealed mildly abnormal cells on my cervix. I'd been referred to a gynaecologist for a colposcopy, but I wasn't too concerned.

The same thing had happened a year earlier but the gynaecologist dismissed it, saying it was the way my cells divided.

Eventually, I tried to book my colposcopy in November but the gynaecologist had retired so I had to undergo another Pap smear.

I was horrified when they discovered that I had severely abnormal cell changes.

"What does that mean?" my sister, Leigh, 33, asked.

"I could have cervical cancer," I stuttered.

Weeks later, I had a cone biopsy to remove the tumour from my cervix.

"I'm afraid you have stage one cervical cancer," the doctor said. "I've removed the cells but you'll need treatment."

Tears spilled, as he said I could either have a radical hysterectomy to remove my womb, leaving me infertile, or a radical trachelectomy to remove most of my cervix and, hopefully, preserve my fertility.

Other than that I could do nothing but hope the

cancer didn't return.

"I recommend having a hysterectomy to give you the best chance of preventing recurring cancer," he explained.

"I'd rather die than not have children," I sobbed.

At 29, I wasn't in a serious relationship but I'd always assumed I'd have children one day.

My mum, Margaret, twin sisters, Leigh and Kate, 24, and brother, Adam, 26, all gave me their support.

"You could always

## I'd rather die than not have children

adopt," Katie suggested.

"I know," I sighed. "It just wouldn't be the same."

I started researching cervical cancer on the internet and was surprised to discover almost all cases were caused by a sexually transmitted infection, the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV).

I'd been going for my regular Pap smear every two years since I was 18 and knew nothing about HPV. I contacted The Gynaecological Awareness Network (GAIN), and spoke to the founder, Kath.

"The trachelectomy doesn't guarantee fertility and I just can't face the

thought of having a hysterectomy at my age," I told her.

"Well, let's explore your third option," Kath replied.

In January, I went for a PET scan and an MRI to determine whether the cancer had spread. I breathed a sigh of relief when the results came back clear.

"If I was a betting man I'd say you will get away with doing nothing," my oncologist said.

"Fantastic," I beamed.

I agreed to undergo a colposcopy every three months to check the cancer hadn't returned.

More than six months have now passed since the tumour was removed and, fortunately, I'm still in the clear.

The main thing that has struck me throughout this whole ordeal is the lack of education and support for people suffering from gynaecological cancer.

Our mothers, wives and daughters are dying from it every day. I hope my story encourages other women to educate themselves about how their bodies work before it's too late.

**Amy Fidler, 29, Bentley, WA**  
*Women across Australia will celebrate National Gynaecological Awareness Day on September 10.*

test after three months. By this stage, 97 per cent of people who have been infected by the virus will test positive. See a doctor you trust to perform the tests so they can counsel you regarding the process involved. They can also organise for you to have a set of tests to check for any other sexually transmitted diseases.

## Is glue as good as stitches?

**Q** My eight-year-old son recently fell and split his head on the corner of a table. In hospital, they used a type of glue instead of stitching his head. Is the glue as good as stitches?

**A** The advantage of gluing a wound is that it doesn't require anaesthesia. Giving a local anaesthetic to a child is difficult and painful. The glue or tissue adhesive can only be used for wounds that are smaller than 3cm, have fairly straight edges and are not very deep. There is a slightly increased chance of the wound reopening but, in all other aspects, the healing is identical to a sutured wound.



If you've a query for Dr Vered, write to her at the address on the story coupon. Dr Vered can only answer queries in this column. Advice given is a guide and should not be treated as a substitute for independent professional medical advice. See contents page for location of ACP's privacy notice.

## Dr Vered's FACT FILE

- Since the introduction of Pap smear testing the number of women developing cervical cancer has decreased.

- HPV is involved in the causation of virtually all cervical cancers, however

most women infected with HPV never develop cancer. Smoking, reduced immunity and infection with particular strains of the virus increase the risk of cancer occurring.

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