



WOMEN'S HEALTH

CERVICAL CANCER PREVENTION AND TREATMENT SAVES WOMEN'S LIVES IN ECUADOR



In Ecuador, cervical cancer needlessly kills thousands of women each year. Ecuador's cervical cancer burden is reflective of that of Latin America, with a four times higher rate of morbidity and five times higher rate of mortality compared to the United States. Currently, 36% of all women in Ecuador have never been screened for cervical cancer, the majority of whom are indigenous and have little to no access to such services.

Visual Inspection with Acetic Acid (VIA) is an alternative screening method to cervical cytology that is recommended in low-resource settings. VIA is a naked eye visual inspection of the cervix uteri after application of diluted acetic acid (VIA), where the cervix is temporarily stained white to allow precancerous lesions to be detected and treated. Upon identification of an abnormality, safe and proven treatment of abnormal lesions using ablative methods including cryotherapy is the most common treatment approach.



In 2017, FIBUSPAM received a grant from the International Foundation to participate in training from the WHO on how to implement the VIA method in a low resource setting. After the 2017 VIA training, FIBUSPAM practitioners incorporated VIA screening into its mobile medical clinics, thus taking cervical cancer screening to some of the most remote communities in Ecuador. FIBUSPAM has now screened over 1,000 previously unscreened women, finding a higher-than-expected rate of VIA positive women, with 130 women, or 13% of all cases seen testing positive for cervical cancer or pre-cancerous lesions. The majority of VIA positive women were successfully treated using cryo-therapy.

Manuela is thirty-eight years old and has ten children, one of whom died from a fever when he was three years old. She and her husband and her nine surviving children have lived on the beautiful mountainside of Guamoto, Ecuador for their entire lives. They have a small farm where they grow corn and potatoes. They also have two milking cows and five pigs. Manuela spends her days caring for her children and her plants and animals. The family consumes the majority of what she grows. Manuela's husband spends his weeks in the nearby city of Riobamba where he earns a modest income as a driver to help support his family.

All of Manuela's children were born at home and she has never seen a gynecologist or an obstetrician. Overall, access to healthcare is very limited for her and her family. When Manuela learned that FIBUSPAM was visiting her village and providing free general medicine consults and gynecological exams she was very excited. On the day of the clinic, she arrived with her children and waited to be seen by FIBUSPAM doctors and volunteers.

Manuela decided to undergo cervical cancer screening which was performed by Dr. Amanda Horton. Using the Visual Inspection with Acidic Acid (VIA) method, Dr. Horton found that Manuela had pre-cancerous lesions, which she was able to treat immediately using cold coagulation. Because of this treatment, Manuela's lesions will not develop into cancer. Manuela will have a chance to have a productive and healthy life, and her children will continue to have a healthy mother.



Cervical Cancer prevention and treatment through the VIA method saves women's lives in Ecuador and improves the life on Ecuadorian children in need. Studies show that when mothers are healthy, children and families are overall healthier as well. Children who are raised by healthy and supportive parents achieve a higher-level education and are more likely to become economically successful. Oftentimes, women who have received cervical cancer treatment through FIBUSPAM will then return with other women in their communities as well as their own children and spouses to receive medical care and treatments as needed. As such, cervical cancer screening serves as an additional entry point to treat thousands of families in need.

FIBUSPAM aims to scale up our cervical cancer screening program by offering these services to an additional 5,000 women and increasing our ability to treat advanced cancers.

