



NEWS RELEASE

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NORCAL Hosts Focus Group on Cervical Cancer and Medical Liability

San Francisco (June 17, 2008)—In what may have been the first meeting of its kind, more than two dozen risk managers for professional liability insurers and healthcare organizations in the U.S. met in San Francisco on May 7-8 to discuss the risk management challenges and potential risks that surround the new professional clinical association guidelines for the early detection of cervical cancer lesions as well as the new FDA-approved human papillomavirus (HPV) molecular testing.

Hosted by NORCAL Mutual Insurance Company, the focus group also reviewed issues surrounding the conventional Papanicolaou (Pap) test and the adoption of clinical recommendations for clinical practice.

Stephen M. Farber, NORCAL Vice President of Risk Management and Continuing Medical Education, who led the focus group, asked attendees to consider whether an “awareness gap” may exist among many clinicians in women’s health when it comes to new testing capabilities.

Widely published data indicate that there is nearly 100 percent detection sensitivity with new testing, while Pap alone ranges from roughly 65 to 85 percent. Recently, there have been a growing number of cases involving the missed diagnosis of cervical cancer where HPV testing was not performed. Invited experts helped the audience understand both the clinical context surrounding cervical cancer risk assessment and the risk management challenges from the perspective of legal defense.

The group learned what professional liability companies such as NORCAL and The Doctors Company are doing to educate their insured women’s health clinicians about new guidelines. They also reviewed currently available educational materials for effectiveness as risk-reduction tools, such as a pocket-sized, laminated card from NORCAL that provides guidance for Pap and HPV testing in primary cervical cancer screening.

Speakers at the focus group included:

- Walter Kinney, MD, a nationally known gynecologic oncologist with Kaiser Permanente in Sacramento
- Susan Wysocki, President and CEO of the National Association of Nurse Practitioners in Women’s Health, Washington, DC

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- Mark DeFrancesco, MD, Chief Medical Officer of Women's Health Connecticut, Avon, CT, the largest obstetrics-gynecological group in the U.S.
- Phillip J. Duffy, Esq., Gibbons P.C., an attorney specializing in medical malpractice cases related to cervical cancer

Farber urged his fellow risk managers to further the education of healthcare providers in the new realities of cervical cancer diagnosis and prevention.

NORCAL Mutual Insurance Company was formed in 1975 to provide the highest quality medical professional liability insurance, products and services to its policyholders. NORCAL insures nearly 13,000 physicians, medical groups, hospitals, clinics and allied healthcare facilities primarily in Rhode Island, California and Alaska.

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