

# Secret Women's Business

WOMEN, AND MOTHERS IN PARTICULAR, TEND TO THINK OF THEMSELVES AND THEIR OWN WELLBEING AFTER EVERYTHING ELSE, WRITES **KIM HAYES**



Dr Kim Hayes (pictured second left) with colleagues from Complete Healthcare International.

“...take time to take care of yourself.”

Women in general and mothers in particular tend to think of themselves and their own wellbeing after everything else – even making those 300 cupcakes they promised for the school fete takes priority over their health check.

“I’ll do my check up when I go back home ...”, a promise many expat women make to themselves while in Singapore.

And what actually happens when they arrive back in their homeland for a precious and well-deserved “break”? They embark on a whirlwind tour to family, in-laws, out-laws and friends with every moment accounted for. So, the long overdue Pap smear and breast check gets pushed to the bottom of the list, again.

Dr Kim Hayes, GP/Family Doctor  
Complete Healthcare International  
part of Body with Soul group  
45 Rochester Park  
Call 6776 2288 or  
visit [www.chi-health.com.sg](http://www.chi-health.com.sg)  
[www.bodywithsoul.com](http://www.bodywithsoul.com)

I have heard this scenario happening too many times. As part of my regular “Welcome to Singapore health tips” talks, I ask and encourage women to think of themselves – even if only because their family depends on them!

Pap smears are no one’s idea of a great day out. But once it is done, it doesn’t have to be thought of again for a while. There are a few things that are worth knowing about Pap smears. Not all smears are equal. There are two basic types – the “slide” and “fluid”. The older type, which is still performed in many clinics, is where the cervix cell sample is placed on a slide and fixed with solution and then sent to the lab to be looked at under the microscope. The problem with this method is that most of the cells will be obscured by mucous and/or blood and therefore unreadable. A more accurate Pap smear is the Thinprep type. Here the collected sample is placed in fluid and sent to the lab where the cells are separated and all assessed under the microscope.

Currently in Singapore and Australia, the recommended interval between normal Pap smears is 2 years, whereas in the UK it is 3 years and in the USA, annually. Generally, Pap smears are recommended 2 years after sexual debut or at 20 years of age and should be a regular feature of women’s screening until the age of 70.

Cervical cancer is caused by the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). There are now vaccines available to cover the different subtypes of cancer causing HPV. I am an advocate of HPV vaccination (which is a whole topic by itself!) as it has been proven to prevent cancer of the

cervix amongst other cancers. It must be stressed, though, that even if a person has been vaccinated against HPV, the Pap smear is still important as only 90% of cervix cancer is prevented with the current vaccines.

Breast screening is also very important. Many women think that their risk is small because breast cancer is not in their family. Whilst it is true that a positive family history puts a woman more at risk, most breast cancers are diagnosed in women with no such family history. It is worth knowing the risk factors for breast cancer include obesity, hormone use and excessive alcohol consumption. In general, regular breast checks are recommended for women from 40 years of age - and younger if there is a family history of the disease. The check may include a physical examination, mammogram (special breast X-ray) and an ultrasound scan.

Again, different countries have different recommendations for how often these checks should be done, but SOME sort of check should be done annually by a doctor for this all too common a condition.

So, take the time to care for yourself. Early detection saves lives. It really is important both for peace of mind and good health!