

# [Thesis: Surviving Cervical Cancer: A History of Prevention, Early Detection, and Treatment](#) <sup>[1]</sup>

By: Darby, Alexis Keywords: [History of cervical cancer](#) <sup>[2]</sup> [Science communication](#) <sup>[3]</sup>

Editor's note:

Alexis Darby defended her thesis titled "Surviving Cervical Cancer: A History of Prevention, Early Detection, and Treatment," in May 2019 in front of committee members Jane Maienschein, Carolina Abboud, and Karin Ellison, earning her a Bachelor's degree from Barrett, the Honors College. <https://repository.asu.edu/items/53339> <sup>[4]</sup>

Abstract:

Cervical cancer, which many physicians as of 2019 consider to be a success in terms of establishing widely used forms of early preventative and diagnostic technologies, experienced a [reduction](#) <sup>[5]</sup> in incidence rates in women by over fifty percent between 1975 and 2016. Cervical cancer does not often present in women with symptoms until it has entered a later stage of the disease. Because of this fact, in the early twentieth century, physicians were often only able to diagnose cervical cancer when either the woman reported complaints or there was a visual confirmation of lesions on the [cervix](#) <sup>[6]</sup>. The symptoms women often reported included vague abdominal pain, bleeding after sex, and abnormal amounts of vaginal discharge, all of which are non-specific symptoms, making it even harder for women to be diagnosed with cervical cancer.

This thesis answers the following question: How does the history of cervical cancer show that prevention helps reduce rates of cancer-related deaths among women? By studying the history of cervical cancer, people can understand how a cancer that was once one of the top killers of women in the US has declined to become one of the lowest through the establishment of and effective communication of early prevention and diagnostics, both among the general public and within the medical community itself. This thesis is organized based on key episodes which were pertinent to the history of cervical cancer, primarily within the United States and Europe. The episodes are organized in context of the shifts in thought regarding cervical cancer and include topics such as vaccine technologies like the Gardasil and Cervarix vaccines, social awareness movements that educated women on the importance of early detection, and analyses of the early preventative strategies and attempts at treating cervical cancer.

After analyzing eleven key episodes, the thesis determined that, through the narrative of early attempts to treat cervical cancer, shifting the societal thought on cancer, evolving the importance of early detection, and, finally, obtaining a means of prevention, the history of cervical cancer does demonstrate that the development of preventative strategies has resulted in reducing cancer-related deaths among women. Understanding what it took for physicians to evolve from simply detecting cervical cancer to being able to prevent it entirely matters because it can change the way we think about managing other forms of cancer.

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## Subject

[Cervix uteri--Cancer](#) <sup>[7]</sup> [Cervical cancer](#) <sup>[8]</sup> [Cancer](#) <sup>[9]</sup> [History of Medicine](#) <sup>[10]</sup> [Medicine, History](#) <sup>[11]</sup>

## Topic

[Technologies](#) <sup>[12]</sup> [Outreach](#) <sup>[13]</sup>

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## Links

[1] <https://embryo.asu.edu/pages/thesis-surviving-cervical-cancer-history-prevention-early-detection-and-treatment>

[2] <https://embryo.asu.edu/keywords/history-cervical-cancer>

[3] <https://embryo.asu.edu/keywords/science-communication>

[4] <https://repository.asu.edu/items/53339>

[5] <https://embryo.asu.edu/search?text=reduction>

[6] <https://embryo.asu.edu/search?text=cervix>

[7] <https://embryo.asu.edu/library-congress-subject-headings/cervix-uteri-cancer>

[8] <https://embryo.asu.edu/library-congress-subject-headings/cervical-cancer>

[9] <https://embryo.asu.edu/library-congress-subject-headings/cancer>

[10] <https://embryo.asu.edu/medical-subject-headings/history-medicine>

[11] <https://embryo.asu.edu/medical-subject-headings/medicine-history>

[12] <https://embryo.asu.edu/topics/technologies>

[13] <https://embryo.asu.edu/topics/outreach>

[14] <https://embryo.asu.edu/formats/essays-and-theses>