



CONTACT:
Kelley O'Neal
212-642-7785 (Onsite: 646-387-1505)
Edelman
kelly.o'neal@edelman.com

TV STAR JOANNA GARCIA BRINGS NATIONWIDE CERVICAL CANCER AWARENESS CAMPAIGN TO CHICAGO

Women Lack Critical Facts about Cervical Cancer, According to 2005 Survey

November 18, 2005 – Chicago, IL – “Cervical cancer is linked to a common virus, but so few women know it or what they can do about it.” That’s the message actress JoAnna Garcia, best known for her starring role on WB’s hit TV series *Reba*, will bring to Tampa on Friday, November 18, 4:00 – 6:00 pm, at Chicago’s Lincolnwood Town Center. Garcia and Diljeet Singh, MD, DrPH, from the Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, will be at Lincolnwood Town Center to talk about cervical cancer and also invite participants to share in a productive Make the Connection beading activity. Participants will be able to bead their own bracelets to show their support for cervical cancer education. Both Garcia and Dr. Singh are supporting the Make the Connection campaign to raise awareness about cervical cancer and its cause, a common virus called human papillomavirus, or HPV.

Make the Connection is a public education campaign sponsored by the Cancer Research and Prevention Foundation (CRPF) and Step Up Women’s Network, with support from Merck & Co., Inc., to raise awareness and understanding of cervical cancer, its cause and the importance of preventive screening through Pap tests. Worldwide, cervical cancer is diagnosed in about 500,000 women each year and responsible for more than 280,000 deaths. In the United States, about 10,000 women will develop cervical cancer this year and about 3,000 will die from this disease.

The campaign urges women to “make the connection” between cervical cancer and HPV. Despite the fact that approximately eight of 10 sexually active women will be infected by HPV in their lifetimes, 76 percent (3,432 respondents nationwide) of women who participated in a 2005 nationwide survey conducted by the campaign partners did not know that cervical cancer is caused by the virus. The awareness level was very similar locally, with 75 percent (144 respondents) of women residing in Florida who participated in the survey who did not know cervical cancer is caused by the virus.

“I was part of the majority of women who didn’t know about the connection between cervical cancer and HPV,” said Garcia, who has also appeared in *Not Another Teen Movie*, *Dawson’s Creek*, *Boston Public* and *Party of Five*, and is now one of several celebrities participating in *Make the Connection*. “The value of this campaign is that it not only educates women in a very positive, empowering way, but also encourages them to connect with other women in an effort to beat cervical cancer.”



“Many women don’t know that cervical cancer is a preventable cancer,” said Dr. Singh. “Women should do what they can to learn about cervical cancer and its connection to HPV, and talk to their doctors about preventive screening.”

“Through this campaign, we will provide women with information about cervical cancer, HPV and the importance of regular Pap screening,” added Carolyn Aldigé, Founder and President of the Cancer Research and Prevention Foundation.

Making the Connection

A key element of the campaign is the Make the Connection bead, part of a create-it-yourself bracelet kit that will help raise cervical cancer awareness. Make the Connection bracelet kits are available free through the campaign’s web site and toll-free line – www.maketheconnection.org and 888-4-HPV-CONNECT – and also at Make the Connection beading events across the country. Everyone who orders the free Make the Connection bracelet kit will get two kits, so she can invite someone to join her in showing support against cervical cancer. The beading events will bring women and girls together to bead, talk about cervical cancer and meet the young actresses who are part of the campaign: in addition to JoAnna Garcia, America Ferrera (*Lords of Dogtown*, *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*, *Real Women Have Curves*) and Beverley Mitchell (*7th Heaven*, *The Crow: City of Angels*, *Baywatch*, *Melrose Place*, *Right on Track*). Locations and dates for all the Make the Connection beading events can be found on www.maketheconnection.org.

About Cervical Cancer and Human Papillomavirus

Cervical cancer is the second-leading cause of cancer death among women worldwide. All cervical cancers are caused by some type of human papillomavirus (HPV), a common virus that spreads through intimate contact and infects approximately 6 million people annually in the United States alone. Infection with the “high-risk” HPV types 16 and 18 is responsible for more than two-thirds of all cervical cancers. Although a person’s immune system usually clears HPV on its own, there is no cure for HPV infection. In addition to the cancer-causing high-risk HPV types, infection with low-risk types can lead to other non-cancerous cervical lesions.

Pap screening, a simple test conducted in doctors’ offices or clinics to detect changes in the cells in and around the cervix, is one of the most effective ways to prevent cervical cancer. Women should talk to their healthcare providers to schedule regular Pap testing, and discuss results with them.

For more information on cervical cancer, HPV and the *Make the Connection* campaign, visit www.maketheconnection.org, or call 888-4-HPV-CONNECT.



About the Cancer Research and Prevention Foundation

The Cancer Research and Prevention Foundation was started in 1985 when Founder and President Carolyn Aldigé first understood the power of prevention to defeat cancer – and recognized that too few of the country’s resources were used to promote cancer prevention research or education. Today, it is one of the nation’s leading health organizations and has catapulted cancer prevention to prominence. Since its inception, the Foundation has provided more than \$74 million in support of cancer prevention and early detection research and education programs. CRPF peer-reviewed grants have been awarded to more than 250 scientists from more than 150 of the leading academic medical centers nationwide. This research has been pivotal in developing a body of knowledge that is the basis for important cancer prevention and early detection strategies.

About Step Up Women’s Network

Founded in 1998, Step Up Women’s Network is a nonprofit, membership organization dedicated to strengthening community resources for women and girls. Through hands-on community service, mentoring and fundraising for women’s health and critical issues, we educate and activate our membership to ensure that women and girls have the tools they need to create a better future.

About Merck & Co., Inc.

Merck & Co., Inc. is a global research-driven pharmaceutical company dedicated to putting patients first. Established in 1891, Merck discovers, develops, manufactures and markets vaccines and medicines in more than 20 therapeutic categories. The company devotes extensive efforts to increase access to medicines through far-reaching programs that not only donate Merck medicines but help deliver them to the people who need them. Merck also publishes unbiased health information as a not-for-profit service. For more information, visit www.merck.com.