

The Preservation of Traditions

Actual Subtitles

Narrator: It was a long time ago when Auntie Chan first came to the clinic for her cervical (sboan) problem. She had this problem for a long time, but hoped it would go away. It was hard for Auntie Chan to go to the clinic. In Battambang Cambodia where she used to live, women got health care from midwives and herbal medicine men. People went to the hospital only when very sick. Auntie Chan did not speak English nor did she drive. All these things made coming to the clinic very difficult. Finally she asked her nephew to drive her to the clinic. She was in pain and the pain did not go away.

Sophia: Hello, auntie!

Chan: Oh! Hello niece! Why are you here at the clinic?

Sophia: I have come back every year since my baby daughter was born. I do not feel well and the doctor advises me to come to see him. What about you Auntie? Why are you here?

Chan: Oh, I have a stomach problem. It is painful and does not seem to go away. I can not take it anymore. That is why I asked my nephew to drive me here to the clinic.

On that same day, Auntie Yan has also come to the clinic. Her mother had died of cervical cancer (maha reek sboan). Auntie Yan had insisted her mother go to the clinic when she was sick. Her mother hesitated until it is too late to be treated.

(Dr. Drew comes into room)

Dr. Drew: (Hello, Yan! It's been a long time since I had seen you.)

Interpreter: He said, It's been a long time since I had seen you, Auntie.

Dr. Drew: Nice to see you again.

Interpreter: He said, "Nice to see you again."

Dr. Drew: I have not seen you since your mom was sick. How are you doing?

Interpreter: He said, "He has not seen you since your mother was sick. How are you doing?"

Yan: I am not doing well. I have been doing a lot of thinking lately. Now I can not sleep or eat. Next week is the 100th day funeral ceremony for my mother.

Auntie Yan is very worried. She is afraid she will get the same disease as her mother. Dr. Drew had examined her uterus and did a pap test. That day, the doctor told her that she was healthy and did not have cervical cancer. The doctor explained that her feelings were normal because her mother had just passed away. The doctor was worried about Auntie Yan. He told her to see him again if she did not feel better soon.

It is time for auntie Chan to see the doctor. Auntie Chan became shy when she saw the male doctor and interpreter.

Dr. Drew: Hello Mrs. Chan! I am Dr. Drew. I'll be your doctor today.

Interpreter: Hello, Mrs. Chan! I am Dr. Drew. I'll be your doctor today.”

Chan: Hello, sir!

Interpreter: Hello, sir!

Dr. Drew: It looks like you are new to the clinic. What can I do for you?

Interpreter: It looks like you are new to the clinic. What can I do for you?

Chan: My leg and knee are hurt.

Interpreter: My leg and knee are in pain, sir.

Dr. Drew: How long has it been a problem?
(The interpretation goes on and narration started.)

Auntie Chan was too shy to tell the doctor about her pelvic problem. Instead, she told him she had a pain in her knee and leg. She was afraid the doctor would want to examine her cervix.

Chetana and Mary: Hello Auntie. How are you?

Chan: I am fine, how are you?

Chetana and Mary: How are you uncle?

Interpreter: Oh! I'm fine. And you?

Chetana and Mary: Yes!

Interpreter: Auntie, I have to leave now. I hope your knee will feel better soon.

Chan: Yes, sir! Thank you so much.

Interpreter: Good bye!

Chan: Yes, sir!

Interpreter: Good bye now!

Chetana & Mary: Yes! Yes!

Interpreter: Yes! Yes! Yes! See you next time. Thank you.

Auntie Chan confided with Chetana, the outreach worker, that she was afraid she had a pelvic problem. She was too embarrassed to tell the male doctor and the male interpreter about her problem. She did not know what to do. Chetana tried to make her feel better by suggesting that she see a female doctor. Chetana would visit Auntie Chan later in the day with Mary, the new outreach worker.

A little later, Chetana went to visit auntie Chan with Mary, the new outreach worker. First Chetana and Mary went to see a woman who had just given birth to a baby. Auntie Vy was the woman's mother-in-law. Auntie Vy believes in the Cambodian ways of taking care of health. She wants her daughter-in-law to follow these ways during her maternity time (sor sai kjai). Her daughter-in-law liked to take care of herself by the American way. Auntie Vy believed that women who do not take care of themselves during maternity (sor sai kjai) will have cervical disease later on.

Auntie Vy: Young people in this country do not like to follow Cambodian tradition.

Phally: Auntie, here in this country we have enough food and good medicine. We can go to the clinic when we are sick.

Auntie Vy: When I go to the hospital, the doctor did not tell me anything.

Speaker D: The woman in maternity does not seem to be accountable.

Mary & Chetana: Hello, auntie!

Auntie Vy: Hello, niece! How are you? Please come in and have a seat. Please sit facing the other way, face that way.

Chetana: Yes!

After seeing the woman and her baby, Chetana and Mary visited Auntie Vy and her friends in the living room.

Speaker F: Oh, she's Cambodian!

Auntie Vy: My house is small. Chetana, does every American woman go to see the doctor often because they have more cervical disease?

Chetana: Auntie, it may seem that way. American women go to the doctor even when they are not sick. By visiting the doctor on a regular basis, cervical problems can be found early. This reminds me of when I was working in the camp. I helped an older woman who had a cervical inflammation (dombao sboan). The doctor said she had let it go for too long. By the time she came to the hospital it was too late to treat her. The woman died. I felt very sad because she did not live to see her children grow up.

Chetana explained to the women that in the United States, the doctor does pap test to find diseases such as cervical inflammation early enough to give treatment. It is easier to treat and there is no need to do a hysterectomy. The pap test can save many women's lives.

Chetana: In Cambodia, we do not have pap tests to detect cervical disease. We have midwives, educated according to Cambodian tradition and belief. Mary's grandmother was a midwife in Cambodia. She helped many women with the delivery.

Mary: Yes, many people called my grandmother "a canoeing lady." We can take care of ourselves by the Cambodian and American ways.

Auntie Vy: Some Cambodian women allow doctors to check their cervix, especially a male doctor, I am very embarrassed.

Chetana: Yes, I know it is embarrassing. Next time you go to the clinic, ask for an appointment with a female doctor.

Auntie Vy: So every woman has to have her cervix examined? What about a pap test? What is it?

Chetana: Taking good care of yourself during the maternity time is not enough. Pap tests tell us about the inside of the cervix. They tell us about things we cannot see with our naked eye. We must follow the Cambodian ways and have pap tests too.

Phally: Some older women do not have husbands anymore, why would they need a pap test?

Chetana: All women must have pap tests whether they have husbands or not, old or young. Older women must have regular pap tests.

Phally: Oh!

Dary: I've had my uterus checked. I do not know if the doctor has done a Pap test on me. Do they use a thing that looks like a duck's beak?

Mary: Yes, that tool is called a speculum.

Dary: Yes!

Mary: It is used during a pelvic exam and to do a pap test. Chetana will show you one later.

Chetana explained that the pap test is done by the doctor inserting a speculum through the vagina. The doctor takes a small flat brush and brushes lightly on the surface of the cervix. This gathers cells that are put on a piece of glass and examined in the lab. The doctor uses a microscope to examine the cells. It takes about three weeks for the results to come back. The pap test is not painful and will not harm the cervix. After explaining the pap test procedure, Mary and Chetana said good bye to the women. They were now going to see Auntie Chan.

(Girls dancing to music)

Sophia is a very busy woman. She respects the Cambodian customs and culture. She was teaching young women to do Cambodian cultural dances. Sophia has also learned to live in American culture. She has a car and helps drive other women to the clinic.

Mary & Chetana: Sophia, how are you?

Sophia: Oh yes! I'm fine.

Chetana: Sophia, have you seen auntie Chan today?

Sophia: Auntie Chan is in the garden.

Chetana: I saw you at the clinic today. How is your health?

Sophia: Yes, I'm healthy. I went for my yearly pap test.

Chetana: Oh! It's good that you have it done yearly.

Sophia: Yes!

Chetana: It is so.

(Sophia said to the dancing girls) Hey! Walk to the front. Don't walk that way.

Sophia told Chetana and Mary that she has regular pap test because she knows it is important for Cambodian women to have cervical health care. Sophia does not have any diseases. She visits the doctor for regular pap tests so that if there is any cancer, her doctor can help her.

Sophia: Taking care of the family is also necessary. My children need me.

Mary: That's right, pap tests are very important in taking care of our health.

Sophia: Right! We had herbal medicine men and midwives for health care in Cambodia. But in this country, we don't have those people to care for our health. So, we must go to the clinic to have a pap test done. This does not mean we only follow the American ways. We have to follow both Cambodian and American ways. So, we will not forget our Cambodian tradition.

Sophia always helps other women by driving them to the clinic for their pap tests. When she needs to go to the clinic, those women will help her by taking care of her children.

Chetana and Mary: Good bye!

Sophia: Yes, same to you.

Chetana and Mary: Yes!

Mary: I wish you well, ok!

(Visiting Auntie Chan)

Chetana visits auntie Chan in her garden. She showed a picture of the diseased cervix that looks like "flower seeds." Disease starts like flower seeds in the ground. We can't see the seeds with naked eye. When disease starts in the cervix we cannot see it with our naked eye. If cervical cancer is not treated at an early stage, it will become bigger. It becomes inflamed and becomes old (toun) even if you do not have a prolapsed uterus (tleak sboan).

Chetana: Auntie, the pap test finds out about cancer seeds. If you have these seeds, the doctor can do surgery and take them out.

Chan: So it is like weeds growing in the garden. We always have to weed them out. Does every woman get cervical cancer, my dear niece?

Mary: Auntie, not every uterus will get cancer. But no one knows who will get it.

Chan: Oh!

Mary: That's right! So we all must have regular check-up, Auntie.

Chan: Yes, niece!

Chetana: Yes, auntie! Just like you weeding your garden.

Chan: Yes, yes!

Chetana: Having pap tests is like weeding the garden. You must have them done on a regular basis not just once.

Chan: Yes, yes

Chetana: If there is cancer (maha reek), the doctor can treat it.

Mary: Auntie, you have done a good job of taking care of your garden.

Chan: Yes niece, I weeded it everyday. That's why it looks this good.

Mary: Now it is time for you to take good care of your health.

Chan: Yes

Several years had passed since our story first began. Auntie Chan is now having regular pap tests. Her earlier cervical problem was treated and she has stayed in good health. Chetana still helps Auntie Chan schedule appointments for regular pap tests with a female doctor.

Sophia: Hello, Auntie!

Chan: What are you doing here at the clinic?

Sophia: Oh! I'm here for my yearly pap test.

Chan: That's it! That Pap test thing! Yeah, I have been here awhile. And my doctor is female.

Sophia: Oh! My doctor is male and his name is David.

Chan: My doctor is very good. And her name is.... Her name is what ever.... I always forget and can't remember. Something like Jan...Janny.

Sophia: Oh...!

Chan: Janny

Sophia: Oh, is that so?

Chan: My doctor's name is Janny.

Sophia: You are lucky, auntie. You have ...

Chan: She is very good, niece.

Sophia: Ah! My doctor is also good. He's ... David ... He is ...

Sophia chooses a male doctor for her pap test. Sophia likes and trusts Doctor Drew. But auntie Chan likes a female doctor. Both women use the clinic for their health care as they need it. Both are having regular pap tests.

Our story is ending here. However, these women want to remind other women age 18 and older to have regular pap tests. We do not know who will get cancer first. Therefore, whether you have problems with your cervix or not, you must have a pap test done. Whether you have a husband or not, you must have a pap test, whether you have children or not, even when you stop having periods, you must have a pap test. Whether you are young or old, you must have a pap test.

It is very important to have pap tests as part of your health care. You have to do both the American and the Cambodian ways.

This video draws largely on the talent and creativity of the Seattle Cambodian community.

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This program is provided by Harborview Medical Center and Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, Seattle, WA Vicky Taylor, MD, MPH< Principal Investigator. Funded by the National Cancer Institute, grant # CA70922.

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Special thanks to: Seattle Cambodian Community Coalition

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Produced by Avcon Media Solutions

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