



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

NEWS RELEASE

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Please note: The North Dakota Department of Health is offering the following story about a Women's Way client.

***Women's Way* Client Asks Others To Learn From Her Experience**

BISMARCK, N.D. – Suzanne Olson, Wahpeton, N.D., urges other North Dakota women to learn from her experience.

Suzanne learned about *Women's Way* in November 2008 when she went to the doctor because she had pneumonia. During the office visit, she mentioned that she was due for her annual exam but could not afford it because she was recently divorced and no longer had insurance. Her doctor told her about *Women's Way*, North Dakota's Breast and Cervical Cancer Detection Program, and gave her information, including the number to call to find out if she was eligible.

Even after she had the information, Suzanne did not call. She did not think anything was wrong. Eventually, her ex-husband lost his insurance and so her three children were also no longer insured. In January 2009, Suzanne went to Social Services to apply for Medicaid for her children. She again mentioned that she was due for an annual exam but did not have insurance and could not afford the doctor bill. The woman from Social Services made an appointment for Suzanne to meet with Jean Smith, the *Women's Way* local coordinator at the Richland County Health Department. Suzanne met with Jean, enrolled in *Women's Way* and made an appointment for an annual exam that would include a pelvic exam, Pap test and clinical breast exam.

In February 2009, Suzanne had a Pap test, and the results were abnormal. "I never thought my Pap test result was going to be bad," Suzanne said. "I'd had Pap tests before when I was insured, and they had been normal. When I found out that that my Pap test was abnormal, I was very grateful that *Women's Way* could pay for the diagnostic procedures and the follow-up Pap tests that were needed."

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January is National Cervical Health Awareness Month, and *Women's Way*, North Dakota's Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program, encourages all women to get regular Pap tests, according to Mary Ann Foss, program director of *Women's Way* for the North Dakota Department of Health.

Although cervical cancer is highly preventable through screening and other preventive measures, about 4,000 women in the United States die from the disease each year. Having a Pap test regularly is the key to preventing cervical cancer. A Pap test can detect the abnormal changes in the cervical cells before they become cancer. If cancer does occur, the Pap test can find it early when it is easier to treat. About 50 percent of women who are diagnosed with cervical cancer have never had a Pap test, and an additional 10 percent have not had a Pap test in the last five years.

Unfortunately, many women do not get Pap tests because they are uninsured or underinsured. The good news is that *Women's Way*, which is available to eligible North Dakota women ages 40 to 64, may help women pay for screenings, including clinical breast exams, mammograms, Pap tests and pelvic exams.

To take part in *Women's Way*, a woman's family can earn up to \$3,675 per month for a family of four. A woman with a household of two can earn up to \$2,428 per month. It's estimated that 24,000 North Dakota women may be eligible for *Women's Way*.

"If you think you can't afford to have a Pap test, it never hurts to try *Women's Way* and see if it can help you," Suzanne said. "It not only definitely saved my life, but also kept me from going deep into debt. I learned from experience that just because your last Pap test was normal doesn't mean that will be the case the next time. Call *Women's Way*. It's just a phone call away."

Call 800-44 WOMEN (800.449.6636) to find out if you are eligible. The toll-free call will ring to a public health office near you.

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