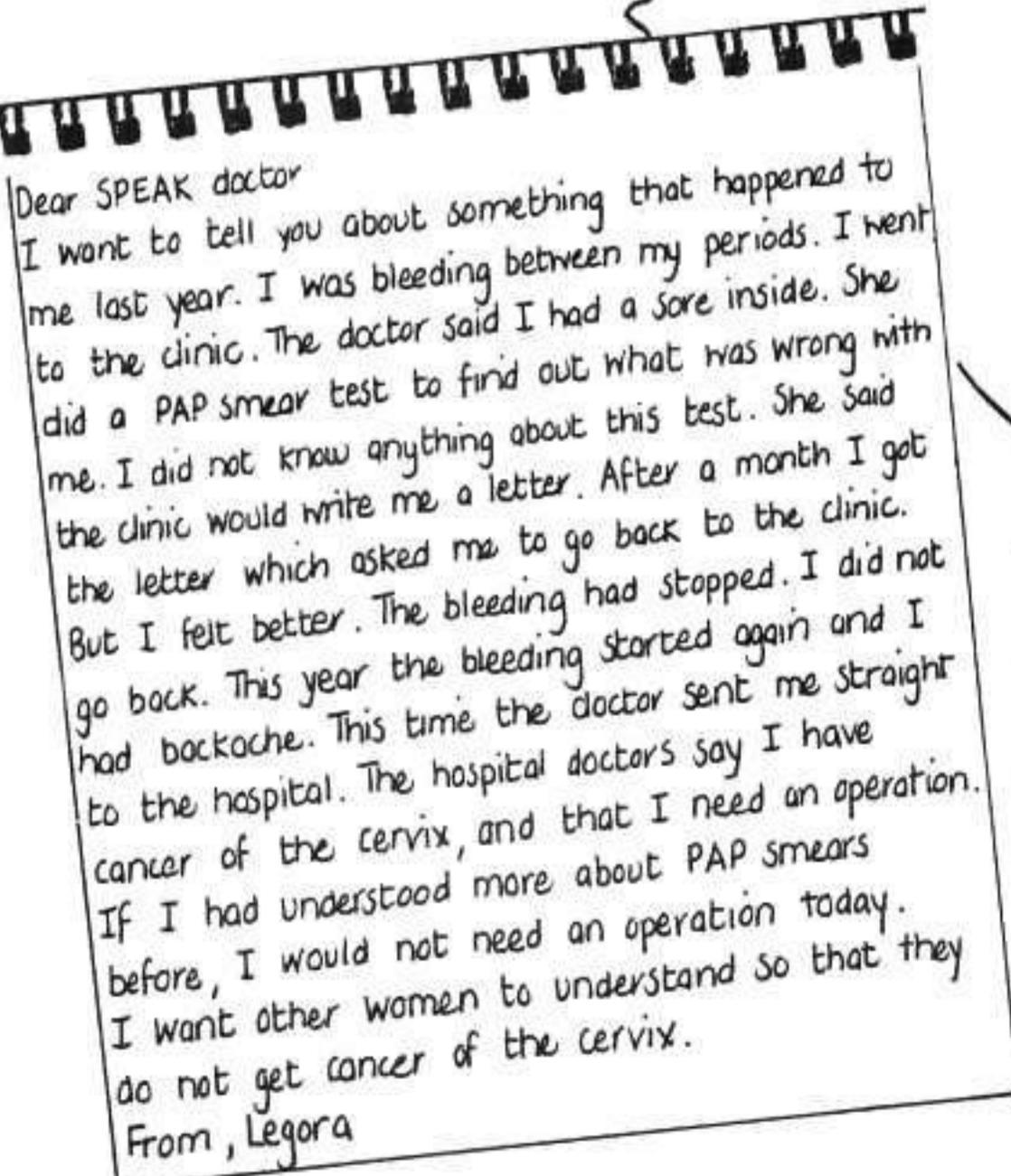
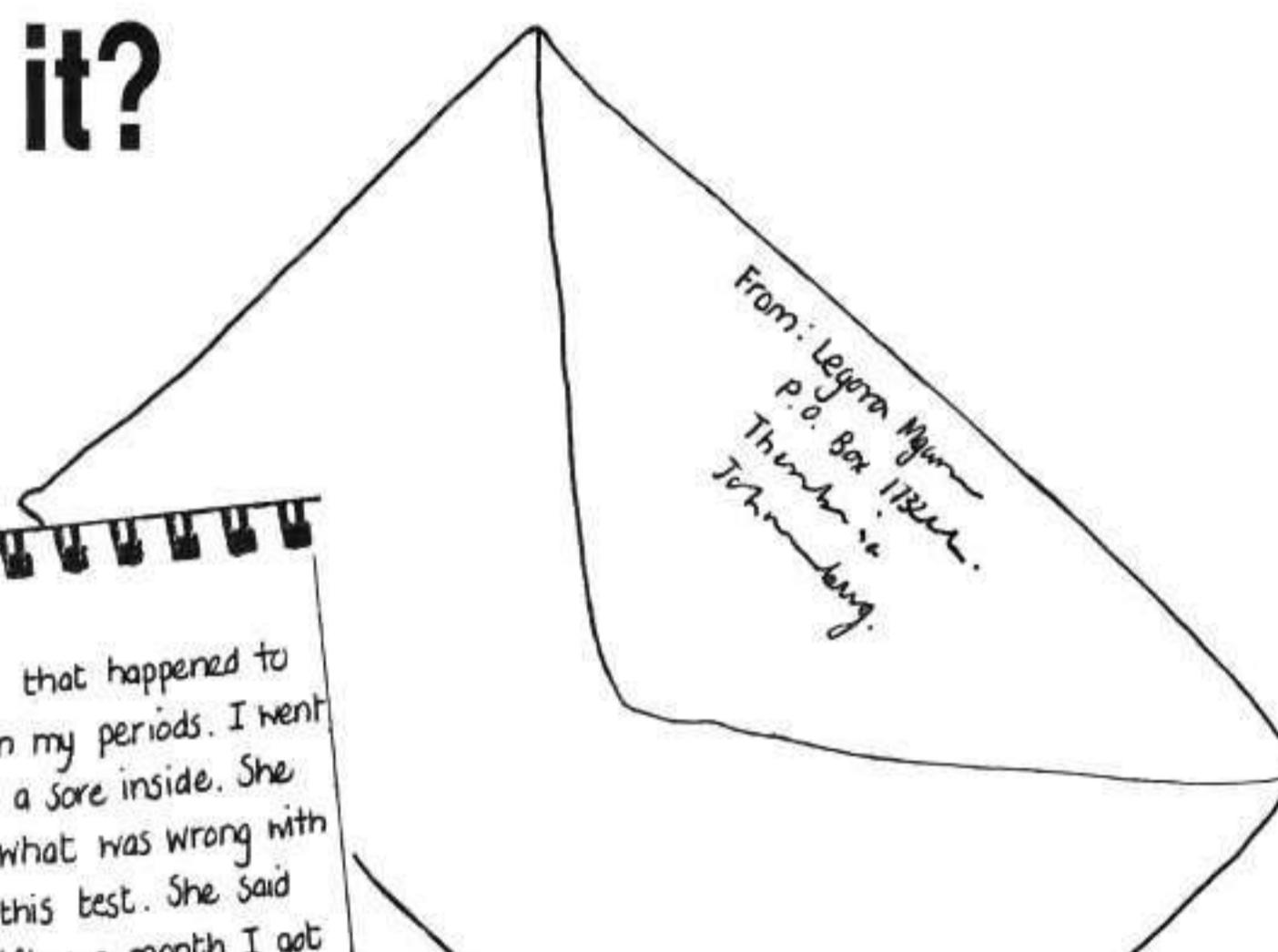


# CANCER OF THE CERVIX

## What is it and how can we prevent it?



Dear SPEAK doctor  
I want to tell you about something that happened to me last year. I was bleeding between my periods. I went to the clinic. The doctor said I had a sore inside. She did a PAP smear test to find out what was wrong with me. I did not know anything about this test. She said the clinic would write me a letter. After a month I got the letter which asked me to go back to the clinic. But I felt better. The bleeding had stopped. I did not go back. This year the bleeding started again and I had backache. This time the doctor sent me straight to the hospital. The hospital doctors say I have cancer of the cervix, and that I need an operation. If I had understood more about PAP smears before, I would not need an operation today. I want other women to understand so that they do not get cancer of the cervix.  
From, Legora

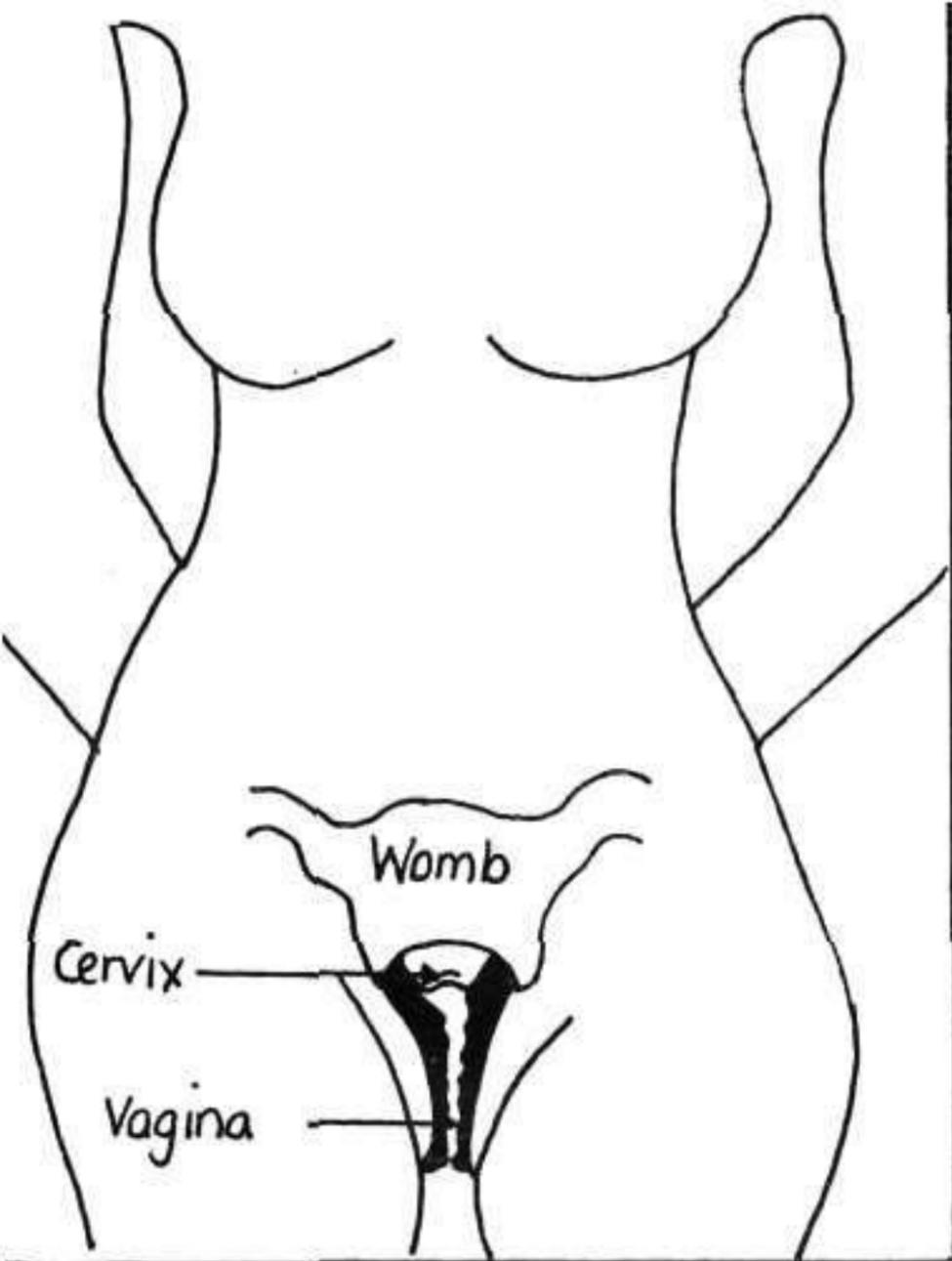


From: Legora Nyam  
P.O. Box 17224  
Thunder  
Johannesburg.

### What is Cancer of the Cervix?

This is a very common disease that kills many women in South Africa every year. The cervix is the neck of the womb (uterus). It is at the top of your vagina. Cancer is a disease which destroys healthy cells in the body. Once the cancer starts spreading it is difficult to treat. If it is discovered early it can easily be cured.

When cancer of the cervix starts, the healthy cells of the cervix slowly change to cancer cells. This change may take months or even years. Once the cancer cells are there they destroy the cervix. The healthy cells all change into cancer cells. They spread to the womb and other organs nearby. When this happens it is very difficult to treat the cancer.



### What Causes Cancer of the Cervix?

When a man and woman have sex different germs may be passed from one partner to the other. The germ which causes cancer of the cervix comes out with the man's sperm, and travels through the cervix and into the womb. The germ moves into the cells of the cervix and can live there for many years before causing cancer. In younger girls it is easier for the germ to get into the cervix. This means that teenage girls having sex are more likely to catch the germ. And women who have many partners are also more likely to catch the germ.

### How Do You Know If You Have Cancer of the Cervix?

To begin with you may not know that you have cancer of the cervix. When it spreads, it causes different problems. You may get bleeding after sex, bleeding between periods, a discharge, pain or backache. If the cancer is found before you have these problems it can be cured.

### How Can Cancer of the Cervix Be Found Early?

The PAP smear is a test done to find early cancer of the cervix. In a PAP smear the cells are scraped off the cervix. The cells are sent away to the laboratory. In the laboratory they look at the cells to see if there is an early cancer. They will send a letter to the doctor with the results of the test. If the PAP smear shows only healthy cells you will be told to have another routine test done in one year. If there is anything wrong with the PAP smear the doctor may ask you to come before next year for another PAP smear. She may send you to hospital for more tests. Ask the doctor to explain anything that you don't understand.

### How Is a PAP Smear Done?

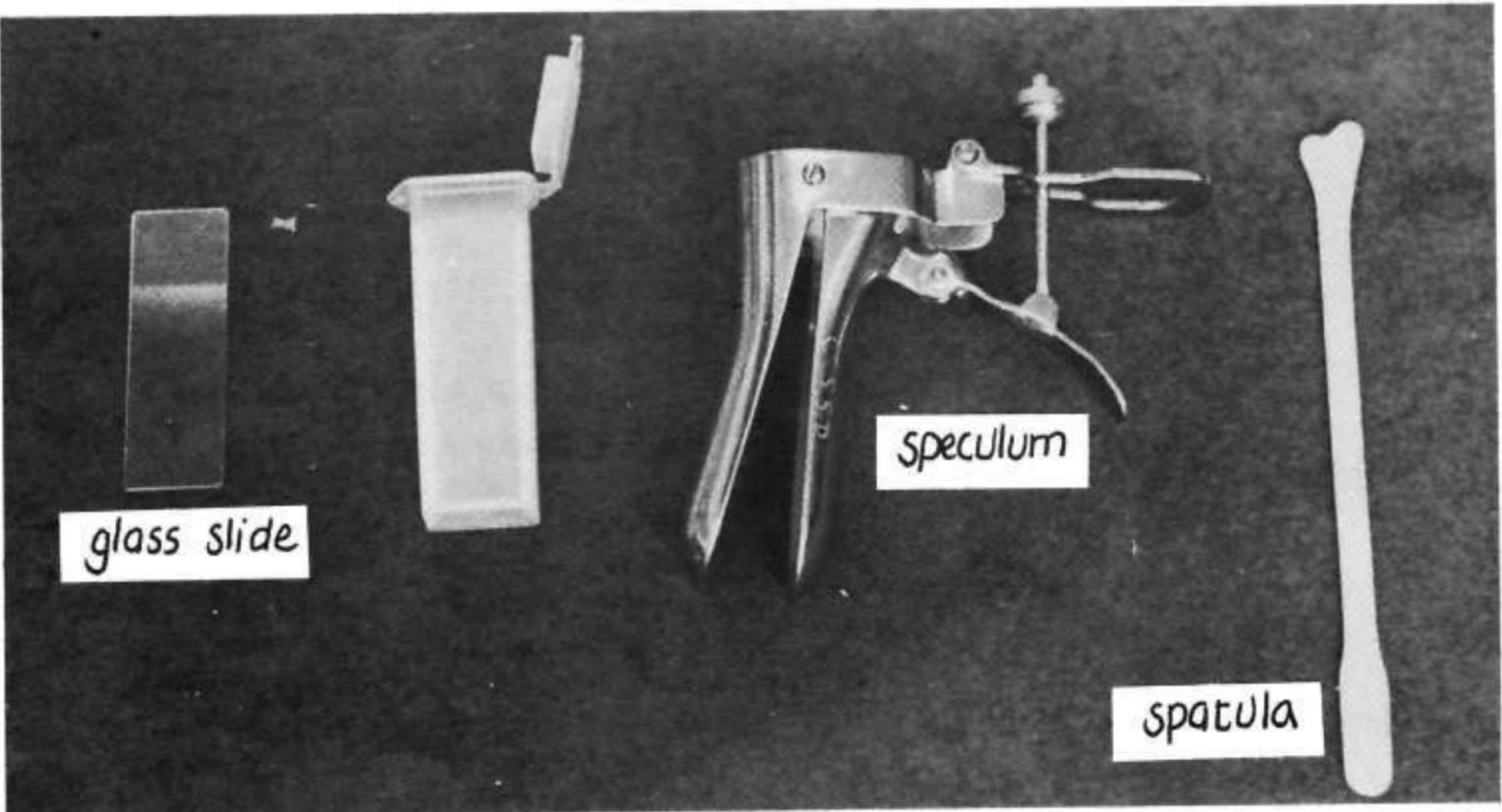
The PAP smear should not be painful. It may be uncomfortable. You are asked to take your pants off and lie down on your back. The doctor or nurse will first feel your tummy. Then she will ask you to bend your knees and let your legs drop open. She will put a metal instrument called a speculum into your vagina. It is closed when it is put into the vagina. When it is inside the vagina it is opened so that the cervix can be seen through the speculum. To help see the cervix clearly a light is shone into the vagina.

A small flat wooden stick is put through the speculum. The stick is used to wipe off the loose cells of the cervix. This does not hurt. The stick is taken out and the cells are wiped on a glass slide. The slide is sprayed and sent to the laboratory. The speculum is gently taken out of the vagina. Then the doctor or nurse will put their fingers inside your vagina to examine your womb to check that it is healthy.

### Where Can You Get a PAP Smear Test Done?

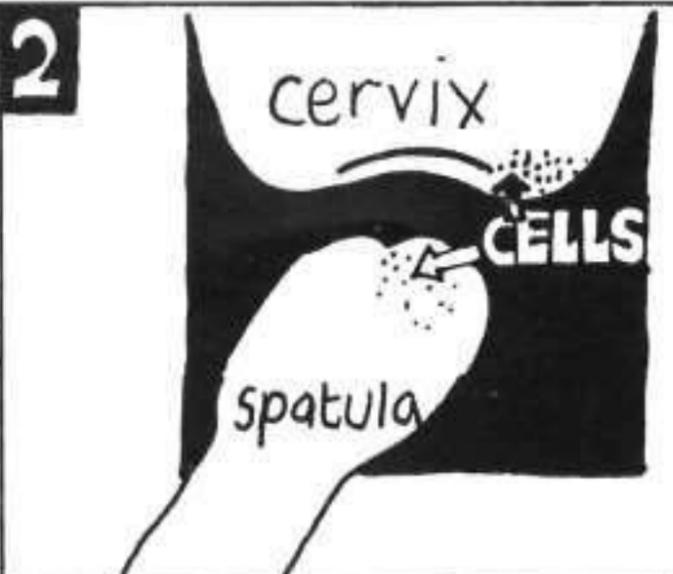
All hospitals and clinics should offer women PAP smears every year. But in South Africa today, most hospitals and clinics have stopped this service. Although PAP smears can save the lives of many women, health authorities are not prepared to spend money on this service.

HAVING A  
**PAP Smear**  
 TEST



Photograph by LESLEY LAWSON

**1** When you go to the doctor for a PAP smear test she will ask you to keep your legs apart. She will put a speculum into your vagina. Then she will use a spatula to scrape some cells from your cervix.

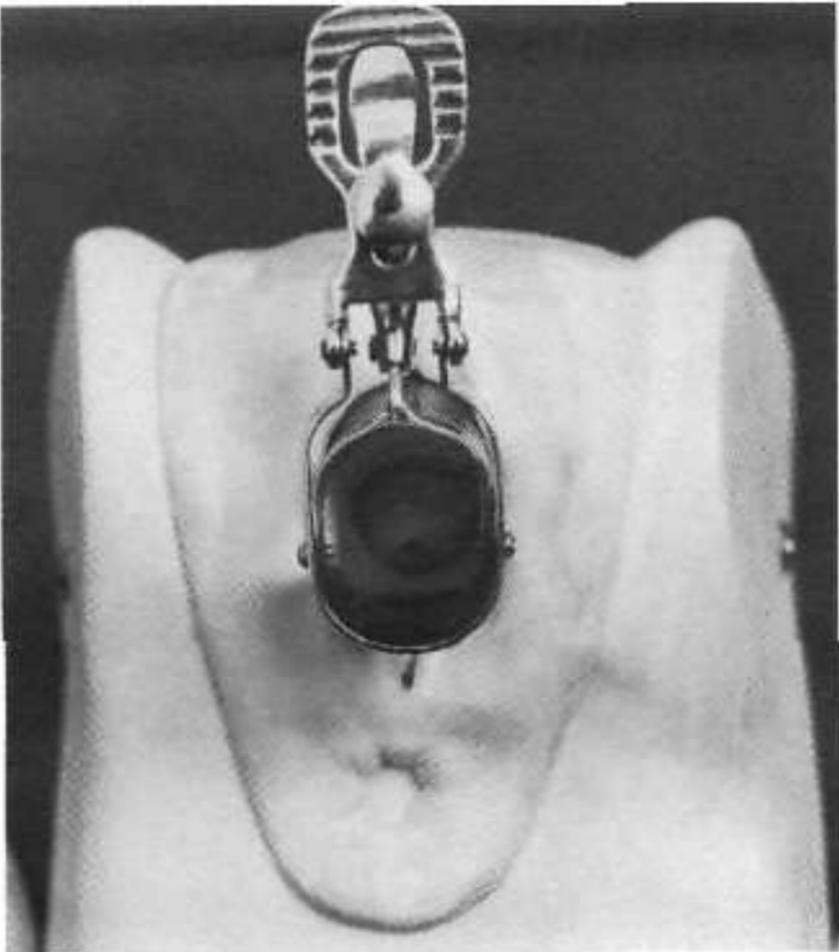


**3** The doctor will smear the cells on to a glass slide. This is the PAP smear.

**4** The PAP smears may be sent to another place for testing.

**5** Ask the doctor when the results will be ready.

**CONGRATULATIONS**  
 you can tell others about your PAP smear test



**This shows part of a woman's body. It shows the speculum in the vagina. You can see what the cervix looks like when you look into the speculum.**

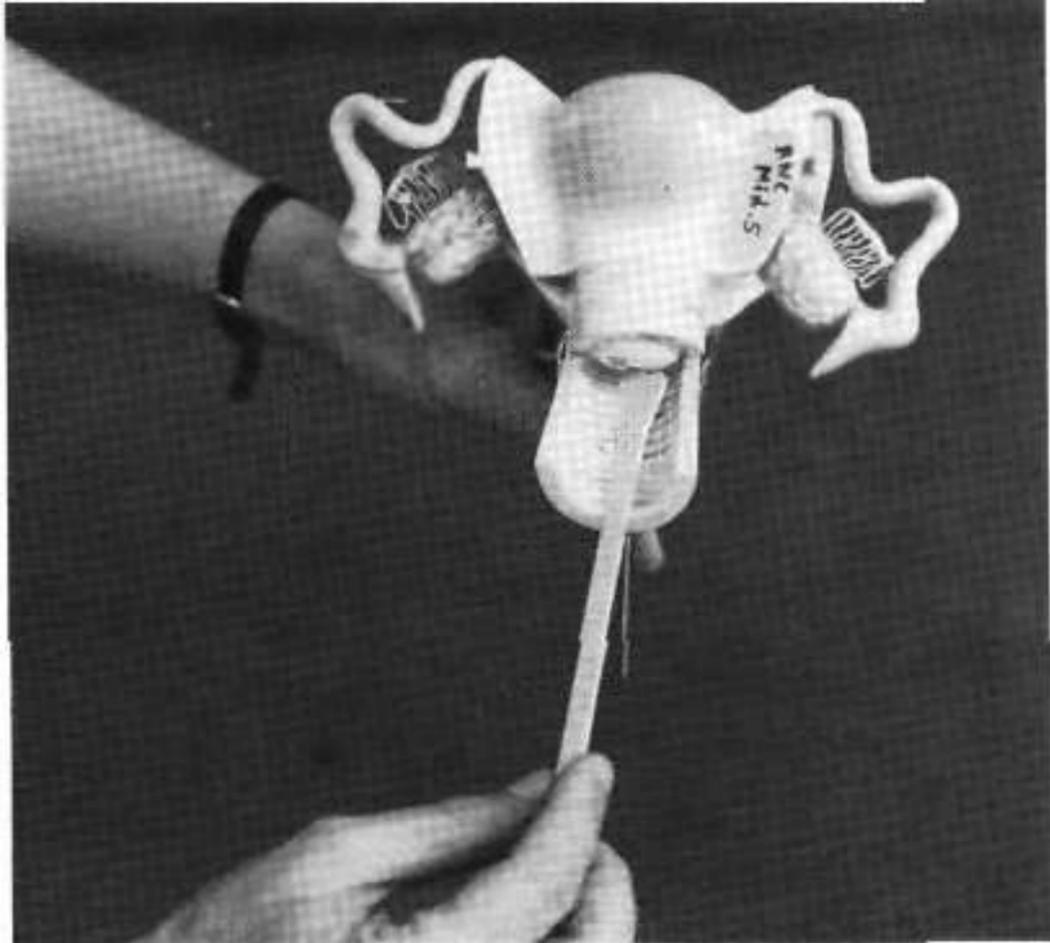
**Photograph by LESLEY LAWSON**

**As women we must organise and demand free yearly pap smears from all state hospitals and clinics.**

We must go to our local clinics and hospitals and ask for a PAP smear. If you cannot get a PAP smear done, contact the National Cancer Association. In Johannesburg they send nurses to your workplace or into your community to run a PAP smear clinic. In Transvaal telephone Sister Chakane or Sister Sinclair at the National Cancer Association (011) 4033300. Not all the branches of the National Cancer Association are able to offer PAP smear clinics. But they will all give talks, or help you to get a PAP smear if you are having problems getting one. Here are the phone numbers of the National Cancer Association branches:

- Durban (031) 259525
- Pretoria (012) 3300051
- Cape Town (021) 6895347
- Port Elizabeth (041) 351212
- Bloemfontein (051) 477535

If you want a doctor to come and teach your union or organisation more about cancer of the cervix, please write to SPEAK.



**This shows part of the inside of a woman's body. It shows the wooden spatula that scrapes the cervix to get cells for testing. The wooden spatula reaches the cervix through the vagina. Above the cervix is the womb.**

**Photograph by LESLEY LAWSON**

### **How Can We Prevent Cancer of the Cervix?**

- \* Have a PAP smear done every year
- \* Always use condoms
- \* Think hard before you sleep with a lot of different men
- \* Spread the message to young women that teenage sex may cause cancer of the cervix.

**In the interests  
of women's  
health we must  
organise around  
PAP smears to  
save our lives.**