

# Program ROSE (Removing Obstacles to cervical ScrEening) - empowering women to eliminate cervical cancer

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## KEY PARTNERS / STAKEHOLDERS\*

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Cervical cancer is the 3rd most common cancer in Malaysian women, often affecting women in the prime of their lives<sup>1</sup>. It is typically diagnosed through pap smears, which tend to include doctor visits for cervical cell collection, which are subsequently analyzed for cellular changes indicative of cancer. Pap smears can often be uncomfortable, painful, and inconvenient, thus only 25% of eligible women in Malaysia tend to have pap smears done regularly<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, since results can take up to 3 months, patients are often lost to follow-up and not linked to care. An alternative to pap smears is HPV (Human Papillomavirus) testing, as 99% of cervical cancer cases are caused by high-risk HPV types.

Program ROSE (Removing Obstacles to cervical ScrEening) is a primary HPV cervical screening program that incorporates self-sampling and digital technology, ensuring that women who are screened are linked to care. It is an evidence-based, women-centered approach which offers women the choice of using a self-swab to enable high-precision HPV testing, followed by prompt availability of results and navigation of follow-up through the women's mobile phone.

HPV testing provides access to improved diagnostic accuracy, allowing significantly less frequent testing over a Malaysian woman's lifetime, while still enabling appropriate preventative screening against cervical cancer. With self-sampling, ROSE embodies privacy and dignity, encouraging more women to willingly participate in screening in a timely manner, while the accuracy and reliability of self-swabs for HPV testing provides greater assurance to women. The mobile portal facilitates communication and linkage of care for women who test positive, seamlessly navigating women through an otherwise complex and overwhelming healthcare system. The population registry system also enables healthcare professionals to track the progress of every woman screened, regardless of where she was screened. This provides a welcome safety net to ensure that women in whom HPV is detected are followed up and managed appropriately, while reducing duplication of services.

Program ROSE illustrates the importance of collaborative partnerships and addressing the multi-faceted barriers from policy changes, and infrastructure readiness to the implementation of a radically new cervical screening program in communities. The paradigm shift in cervical cancer requires a monumental and concerted effort in educating both the healthcare providers and the general public. To date, program ROSE has screened over 22,169 women, with a >90% linkage to care rate for women who screen positive for HPV. The lives of countless have been changed for the better, including over 194 women who have early cancer and precancers identified and subsequently treated.



\* It takes many to achieve a measurable difference, but a special thanks goes to the other ROSE core team members Su Pei Khoo and Serena Lim

1. ROSE Foundation (2019). About Program ROSE. <https://www.programrose.org/program-r-o-s-e>