

Cervical cancer test 'will revolutionise screening'

A test for cervical cancer that could "revolutionise screening" has been found to outperform UK tests at a lower cost, according to a study.

The "epigenetics-based" test detected 100 per cent of the cancers that developed in 15,744 women in a trial led by Queen Mary University of London.

It performed "significantly better" than the pap smear or human papillomavirus (HPV) test, and the study's

authors believe that it would be cheaper if introduced fully. The pap smear detected 25 per cent and the HPV test detected 50 per cent of the cancers in the group of women aged 25-65 in Canada.

Professor Attila Lorincz, the lead researcher who also helped to develop the world's first test for HPV in 1988, called it an "enormous development".

"We're not only astounded by how well this test detects cervical cancer, but it is the first time that anyone has

proven the key role of epigenetics in the development of a major solid cancer using data from patients in the clinic," he said. "Epigenetic changes are what this cervical cancer test picks up and is exactly why it works so well."

Instead of checking for patterns in the DNA genetic code, the new test examines chemical markers that sit on top of the DNA, forming its "epigenetic profile".

"This really is a huge advance in how

to deal with HPV-infected women and men, numbering in the billions worldwide, and it is going to revolutionise screening," the professor said.

"The test is much better than anything offered in the UK at present but could take at least five years to be established."

The study was funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and Cancer Research UK and published in the *International Journal of Cancer*.

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