

## **NARRATOR**

At the beginning of the 21st century, Mexico is still battling infectious diseases. As in many developing countries, malnutrition and alcoholism are common amongst the poor.

Cancer, diabetes and heart disease afflict all of the population.

Cervical and uterine cancer is typically a disease of the poor. It's common not only in developing countries, but also in the world's richer nations.

## **Pastora**

I have two young children to look after. And my mother. She's 81.

## **Rafaela**

I felt bad because of the children. I have children plus the youngest girl. They all need me.

## **NARRATOR**

Every two hours in Mexico, one woman dies of cervical and uterine cancer. By the end of the day, 12 women will have lost their lives to the disease. By the end of the month, 380 will have died. And by the end of the year, it'll have killed 4,600 women in Mexico.

It's an illness that affects the poorer less developed members of society. It's the number one cause of death in women over 25.

## **Elisa**

I was thinking a woman just died here the other day. They're all gathered there. They just brought the coffin.

## **NARRATOR**

Cervical and uterine cancer is a disease that can take 15 to 20 years to develop and it can be treated. The high death toll is alarming, especially as current technology allows for its early detection and successful treatment. But there are many factors contributing to worsen this public health crisis of truly epidemic proportions.

## **Elizabeth**

It's because we don't go for check-ups. It's embarrassing to be checked by a man. But it needs to be done every year. Every year to be on the safe side.

## **NARRATOR**

The highest death rate from cervical and uterine cancer is found in south-eastern Mexico. In the year 2000, the people of Las Choapas, the main village in one of the poorest parts of the state of Veracruz, saw a new project start up. The Veracruz Center for the Prevention of Cancer in Women, Rigoberta Menchú Tum.

This is the only public clinic offering same day services for the poorest women in the area. It's even open on a Sunday.

Between the years 2000 and 2003, this clinic evaluated almost 12,300 women in 180 working days. A little over 2,200 of them underwent electro surgery for the treatment of cancer-related ailments. Of those 2,200 patients, around 1,200 had severe ulcers, around

700 had the human papilloma virus, a wart virus, and there were 150 cases of early cancer. 50 women were sent to specialised cancer centres where their invasive cancers were treated.

**Woman**

Did you explain it to your children? You told them about it, didn't you.

**Pastora**

Yes, and they understood and so far they have helped me a lot.

**NARRATOR**

Today, in Mexico, the number of women over 25 is increasing rapidly. It's predicted that by the year 2020 there'll be 39 million. 15 million more than today. That's almost a third of the population. How many of them will contract cervical and uterine cancer? How will it affect them? How big will the problem be?

**Pastora**

My advice to you is to have a check-up. Money comes and goes. Life doesn't.

**NARRATOR**

Eradication of cervical cancer is of crucial importance. It's an issue of social justice, gender equality, and freedom. The lines of battle have been drawn, each and every contribution is welcome because this is a fight for hope, a fight for life.