



Cervical cancer during Covid pandemic: Are patients presenting with more advanced tumours?

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Objective

Concerns were raised by clinicians at the Oxford Gynaecological Cancer MDT that there was an increasing number of women presenting with large cervical tumours requiring chemo-radiotherapy, possibly due to delays associated with the COVID pandemic. This audit was undertaken to assess whether this was a real event.

Study Design

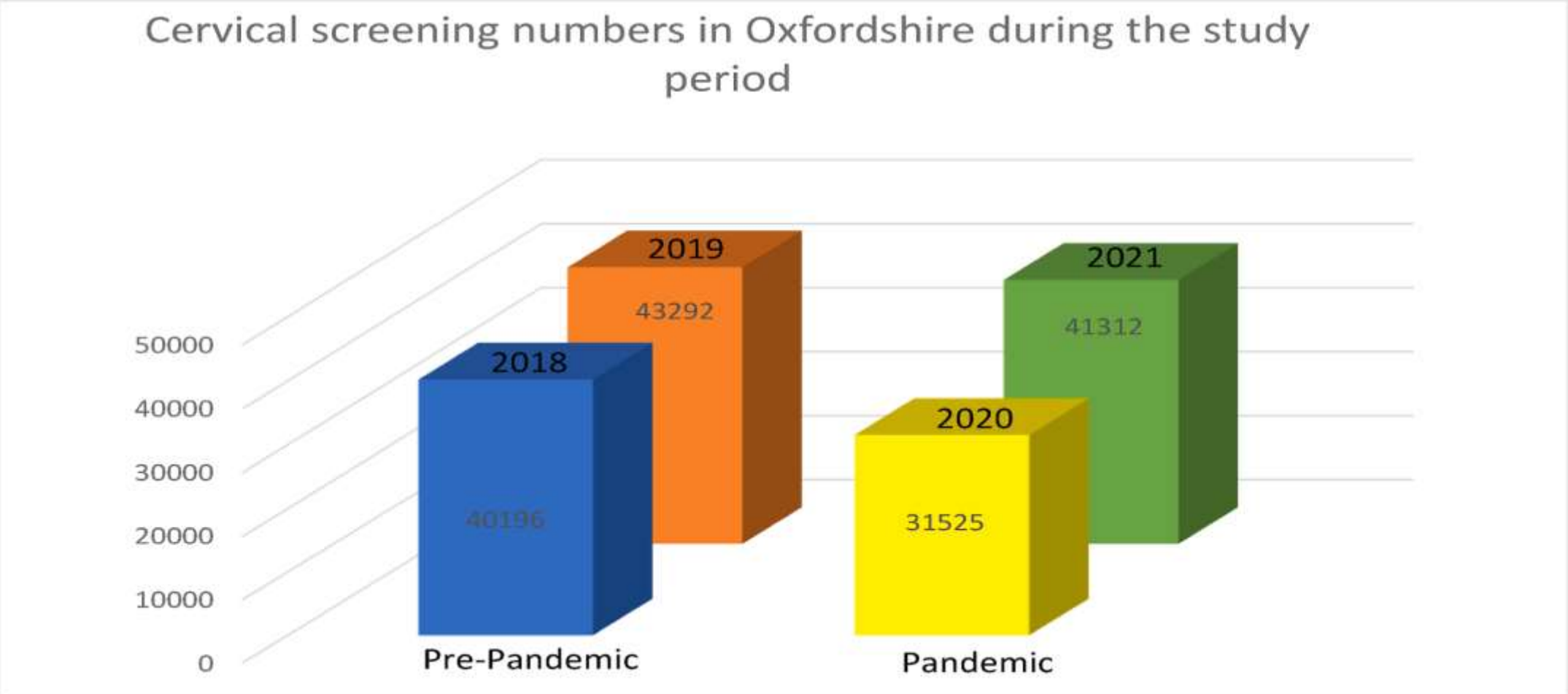
This retrospective cohort study collated the data from the central pathology service covering Oxfordshire, in the Oxford Gynaecological cancer centre.

Methods

The control population consisted of cervical cancer patients during the 2 years pre-pandemic (1st Jan 2018-31 Dec 2019) and the study group were during the 2-year pandemic period (1st Jan 2020 until 31st December 2021). A total of 153 patients (74 control and 79 study) were diagnosed of cervical cancer during the study periods. Variables included in the analysis were age, pathway of referral and diagnosis (cytology or clinical), FIGO stage, tumour histology, tumour size (using maximum diameter on MRI) and treatment.

Results

There was no statistically significant differences was noted in the referral pathways during both periods. Statistically significant stage migration from FIGO stage II to III was detected ($p < 0.05$), though no statistically significant change in tumour size. However, the pattern of tumour volume on case-to-case comparison elicited more cases with larger volumes during the pandemic periods.



Stage comparison between the 2 study periods.

	2018–2019 N = 74	2020–2021 N = 79	X ² Test
Stage I	48	57	P = 0.014*
Stage II	11	2	
Stage III	2	8	
Stage IV	13	12	

Screening history between Pre-pandemic and pandemic periods.

Screening History	Pre-pandemic 2018–2019	Pandemic# 2020–2021	X ²
Never screened	24	16	P = 0.046 *
≤ 3 years	20	34	
> 3 years	30	23	

6 cases the screening history is not available.
P < 0.05.

Results (Continue)

Comparing mode of treatment between two-study periods.

	2018–2019 N = 74	2020–2021 N = 79	X ² test
Early and early advanced stages (Surgically treated)	48 (64.8 %)	57 (72.2 %)	P = 0.91
Locally late Advanced stage (Chemo-radiation)	26 (35.1 %)	22 (27.8 %)	

Conclusion

Referral pathways of diagnosed cancer cervix was not affected during the pandemic in Oxfordshire. Therapeutic treatment numbers were unchanged – but some changes in tumour volume were likely the reason for the impression more such cases. Whether the stage shift noted here is representative of the wider population requires further studies.

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