



The HPV vaccine crisis

M. Cheung¹, E. Cosgrave¹, Z. Fonseca-Kelly¹, E. McSharry², O. Smith³, C. Windrim⁴, S. O'Brien⁴, D. Brennan¹.

¹Department of Gynaecology, Mater Misericordiae University Hospital, Dublin, Ireland. ²Coombe Women and Infants University Hospital, Dublin, Ireland. ³Rotunda Hospital, Dublin, Ireland. ⁴National Maternity Hospital, Dublin, Ireland.



INTRODUCTION

Cervical cancer affects approximately 300 women per year in Ireland, leading to the death of almost 90 women per year. HPV virus has long been known to be a causative virus in cervical cancer, but also penile, vulval, vaginal, anal & oropharyngeal cancer and anal cancer. HPV subtypes 16, 18 and 45 are the most commonly found subtypes in invasive cervical cancer but are also highly prevalent in women with normal cytology (1).

In 2008, the HSE rolled out a secondary prevention programme called CervicalCheck. Under this programme, free cervical smears are offered every 3 years to women aged 25-44 and every 5 years to women aged 45-65, covering approximately 1.2 million women annually. After 6 years of this programme, there has been 77% coverage has been achieved (2).

In 2011, the HSE began offering the Gardasil HPV vaccine free of charge to first year secondary school girls. Gardasil covers subtypes 6, 11, 16 and 18, so protects against the main causative subtypes for cervical cancer but also genital warts. Uptake rates for the vaccine have been decreasing in Ireland in recent times. This has coincided with a number of claims suggesting adverse effects associated with the vaccine, and heavy media coverage of these cases.

The aim of this study was to assess opinions of nursing, midwifery and allied health professionals regarding the HPV vaccine, to ascertain if adequate and informed health promotion is taking place regarding the HPV vaccine.

METHODS

A 12-question paper survey was compiled, assessing demographic information, vaccination status and the perceived impact of the media coverage on their opinion of the HPV vaccine. The survey was manually distributed amongst nursing and allied health professionals in the Mater Hospital, Rotunda Hospital, National Maternity Hospital and the Coombe Hospital over a 5 day period in October 2016. The data was recorded and basic statistical analysis and between-group analysis was performed.

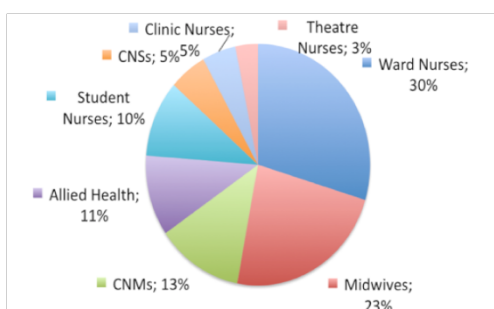


Fig 1. Percentages of respondents from each role

RESULTS

188 people completed the survey, 182 females, 3 males and 3 unanswered. The number of respondents from each role is shown below in Fig. 1. Of the 188 respondents, 38% reported caring for patients suffering from HPV-related cancers. Surprisingly only 55.6% are/would be in favour of the HPV vaccine for their own children, compared to 43.8% of respondents not caring for patients of HPV-related cancers (Fig. 2).

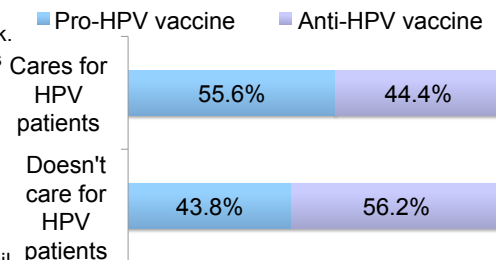


Fig 2. Proportion of respondents that care for patients suffering from HPV-related cancers and those who do not, in terms of support for the HPV vaccine.

Due to the age profile of the respondents, only 10.1% have themselves received the HPV vaccine and of these, 90% are/would be in favour of the HPV vaccine for their own children, compared to 44% of respondents who had not received the HPV vaccine themselves (Fig. 3).

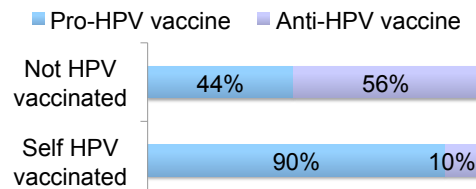


Fig 3. Proportion of respondents that have received the HPV vaccine and those who have not, in terms of support for the HPV vaccine.

Of the 188 people that completed the survey, 76 have children and 112 do not. For respondents with children, 93.4% have consented to routine vaccinations, whereas only 30.2% of respondents with eligible children have consented to the HPV vaccine. Of the respondents without children, 97.3% would hypothetically consent to routine vaccines and 61.6% would hypothetically consent to HPV vaccine.

86.1% of participants were aware of the media coverage about the HPV vaccine. The media coverage made 23.9% more likely to give consent for the HPV vaccine for their own children, 34% less likely and 39.9% stated it would make no difference. The media coverage made 25% more likely to advise their patients to give consent for the HPV vaccine, 26% less likely and 44.6% stated it would make no difference.

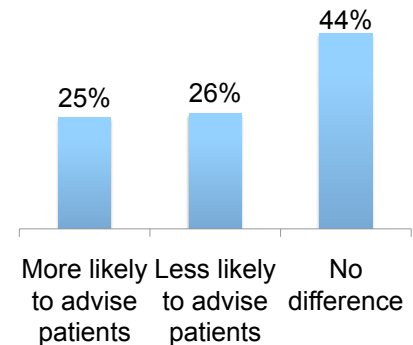


Fig 4. Respondents that are aware of the media coverage of the HPV vaccine, and the influence of the media on their likelihood to recommend the HPV vaccine to patients.

DISCUSSION

This study demonstrates the surprising lack of support for the HPV vaccine, even amongst health professionals. Most unexpected is the split support amongst health professionals that care for patients suffering from HPV-related cancers.

Interestingly, the attitude towards the HPV vaccine varies a lot between respondents who have had the HPV vaccine themselves and those who have not. This is unsurprising, as these respondents have personal experience of the safety of the vaccine and provides hope for the future as more and more health professionals will have received the HPV vaccine under the programme.

It is clear from these results that the media coverage is affecting opinions and decisions to avail of the HPV vaccination, even within the nursing and allied health professions. Given the nature of the interaction that health professionals have with the public and the trust instilled in advice health professionals impart, it is our duty to provide valid and medically-informed information regarding the HPV vaccine.

The comments provided by respondents offer an interesting insight. Many respondents stated they felt media coverage was the only source of information around the vaccine and adverse effects. A number of respondents had never heard of HPV or the vaccine. This highlights that there is a role for staff education within the hospital.

REFERENCES

- 1) Forman D, de Martel C, Lacey CJ, Soerjomataram I, Lortet-Tieulent J, Bruni L, Vignat J, Ferlay J, Bray F, Plummer M, Franceschi S. Global burden of human papillomavirus and related diseases. *Vaccine*. 2012 Nov 20;30 Suppl 5:F12-23. doi: 10.1016/j.vaccine.2012.07.055.
- 2) Flannely GM, Mooney MT, Greehy GM, Keogh EB, McNally SA, Fitzpatrick PE. Establishment of a national cervical screening programme in Ireland, CervicalCheck: the first 6 years. *Eur J Cancer Prev*. 2016 Nov 7.