

HPV Vaccine

There has recently been extensive press coverage about the HPV vaccine Cervarix® manufactured by GlaxoSmithKline and currently being administered to schoolgirls across the UK (the British government has chosen Cervarix® over the more expensive rival Gardasil manufactured by Merck.) Parents and their teenage daughters may be finding themselves under pressure from the medical profession, schools and even peers to take up the vaccine even when there are still many concerns about safety and effectiveness.

In 90% of cases, the body's immune system clears the HPV infection naturally within two years. This is true of both high-risk and low-risk types.

www.cdc.gov/STD/HPV/

Statistics

Cancer Research UK (www.cancerresearchuk.org) states that 'cervical cancer incidence and mortality rates have declined substantially in Western countries with screening programmes, such as the UK where incidence rates rank 141st of the 172 countries worldwide and the mortality rate ranks 148th.'

In the second half of the twentieth century the death rate from cervical cancer for women aged 55-64 dropped by nearly 80% from 30.0 per 100,000 in 1950-52 to 6.2 per 100,000 in 1998-2000.

Figure 2.3: Age-specific mortality rates, cervical cancer, UK, 1971-2007

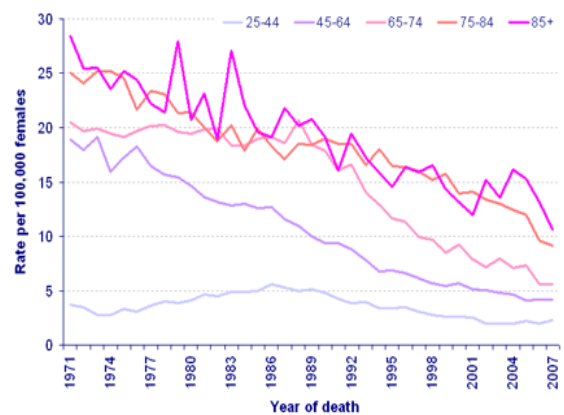
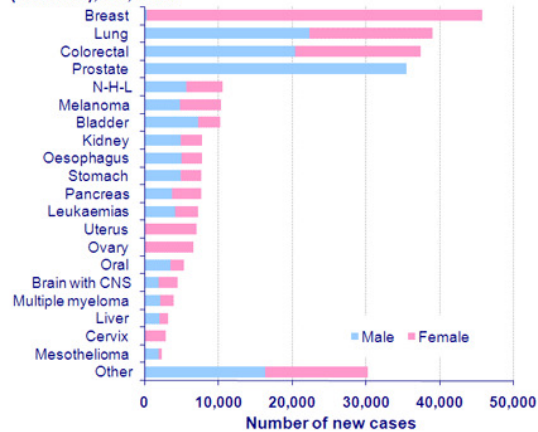


Figure 1.1: The 20 most commonly diagnosed cancers (ex NMSC), UK, 2006



This chart (see Cancer Research UK website) shows where cervical cancer comes in comparison to other types of cancer. From this we might consider that the vast amount of money being spent on the HPV vaccine may be better spent on breast cancer screening and promoting self breast examination amongst our teenage girls.

HPV is a sexually transmitted virus and we need to educate our teenage population about basic facts of sexual health.

Contributory factors

Cancer Research UK also notes that factors such as smoking and taking the Oral Contraceptive Pill increase susceptibility for HPV. It has also been suggested that long-term use of chemical-based feminine hygiene products (cleansing products, tampons, etc) might alter the normal bacterial environment in the uterus that protects it, which in turn induces pre-cancerous lesions. Toxins accumulate in body tissues and may eventually reach critical levels. This could explain why the highest mortality rate from cervical cancer is in the 75-79 age group.



Other possible factors involved in tumour development: sexual behaviour, immune status, genetic predispositions and nutritional status. In a safety trial in Utah, women who smoked were found to have a 3.42 times greater risk of developing cervical cancer than had women who had little exposure to tobacco smoke. Also, women whose diets were high in vegetables had half the risk of getting cervical cancer.

Vaccines

If so many women have HPV but only a small proportion go on to develop cervical cancer then it seems unlikely that the virus alone is the cause. If co-factors are the main causes then a vaccine cannot provide immunity.

It is also worth mentioning that progression from HPV infection to invasive cancer is normally a slow process, taking 10-15 years to appear. Vaccine development only started around 2000 so how can we know the efficacy of the vaccine in preventing this cancer?

Side effects

Safety trials have shown that the arm muscles into which the vaccine is injected react against it. Pain, swelling, itching, bruising and inflammation are frequently reported. MS, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and severely disabling muscle pains have been linked to the aluminium adjuvant* used.

Dr Diane Harper who helped develop this vaccine, said on CBS television news on 7th May 2008 that making the vaccine compulsory was wrong as the vaccine has not been out long enough for us to have post-marketing surveillance to really understand what all the potential side effects are going to be. Since June 8th, 2006, when this vaccine was approved for use in the USA, over 8,000 possible side effects have been reported, including 18 deaths.



Politics

It appears that some of the people advising the World Health Organisation, etc. about this vaccination are also advisors for the pharmaceutical companies producing the vaccines and will stand to gain financially from the vaccine uptake.

Merck has allegedly spent a small fortune on PR to market Gardasil as they are not making as much on Gardasil as previously planned. The company also suffered another financial setback: after initially insisting that it would never settle personal injury claims related to Vioxx deaths, Merck did just that to the tune of \$4.85 billion.

Due to the revised sales figures not being as profitable as originally expected it appears that the pharmaceutical companies are now looking for ways to increase sales and the idea of extending the vaccination to teenage boys is now being suggested.

In summary

At the moment the best advice I can give regarding the HPV vaccine is for parents and teenagers to do some research of their own before making any decision.

Please don't automatically trust that the government has your best health interests at heart. As a responsible parent you want the best for your child. Please take some time to make a decision that you are comfortable with.

One good website aimed directly at teenagers is: www.hpvfacts.co.uk

References:

www.laleva.org/eng/2008/12/hpv_vaccine_mysteries.html (Janine Roberts)
www.cbsnews.com/stories/.../main5253431.shtml (Dr Diane Harper)
www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk/cervical/cervical-cancer.html

* adjuvant definition = a substance used to enhance the body's immune response to an infection or foreign body.

To find out how homeopathy can help you please email/phone me for an informal chat or visit my website.

