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A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF HEALTHCARE PROVIDER AWARENESS AND INFORMATIONAL NEEDS REGARDING THE NINE-VALENT HPV VACCINE

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Abstract

The 9-valent Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine, 9vHPV, was licensed in the U.S. in December, 2014. We assessed healthcare provider (HCP) awareness of the newly approved vaccine and identified questions HCPs have about the vaccine. As part of a larger study, we used semi-structured interviews to ask 22 pediatric HCPs about their awareness of 9vHPV, questions they have about the vaccine, and questions they anticipate from patients and parents. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed then analyzed using inductive content analysis. Over half were aware of the vaccine but few HCPs claimed to be familiar with it. HCPs indicated several questions with common themes pertaining to efficacy, side effects, and cost. Only half of HCPs believed patients or parents would have questions. The results suggest strategies and areas for health systems and public health organizations to target in order to resolve unmet educational needs among HCPs regarding 9vHPV.

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Keywords

HPV; awareness; healthcare provider; vaccine; sexually transmitted infection; education

Introduction

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted infection in the U.S. [1] HPV Infection is a risk factor for genital warts, cervical cancer, anal cancer, penile cancer, and oropharyngeal cancers. In the U.S. an estimated 360,000 people will be diagnosed with genital warts, 12,000 women will be diagnosed with cervical cancer, and over 4,000 will die from cervical cancer this year [1, 2].

Currently, there are three vaccines for HPV prevention. The bivalent vaccine, 2vHPV, protects against HPV types 16 and 18, which are responsible for about 70% of cervical cancers[3]. The quadrivalent vaccine, 4vHPV, also protects against HPV-16 and 18, as well as HPV-6 and 11, the two types that cause about 90% of genital warts [3]. At the end of 2014, the U.S Food and Drug Administration approved a nine-valent vaccine (9vHPV) that protects against the four HPV types in 4vHPV as well as five additional oncogenic types. 9vHPV has the potential to prevent up to 90% of cervical cancers, and many vulvar, vaginal, and anal cancers as well as 90% of genital warts [4].

2vHPV is licensed for females ages 9–26 and 4vHPV is licensed for males and females ages 9–26. 9vHPV is licensed for females ages 9–26 and males age 9–15 [5]. The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends routine vaccination for boys and girls ages 11–12 and catch up vaccination for women through age 26, men up through age 21, and for men who have sex with men or are immunocompromised through age 26 [6]. In February, 2015 ACIP issued the same age-based recommendations for 9vHPV as it did for 4vHPV [7]. ACIP further stated that if a patient returns for the second or third dose and the first dose HPV vaccine product is not available, any available HPV vaccine can be used to continue or complete the series[7].

Despite the substantial benefits of being immunized, vaccination rates remain unacceptably low in the U.S. In 2014, only 60.0% of adolescent girls and 41.7% of adolescent boys ages 13 through 17 received one or more doses of HPV vaccine[8]. Given the already low uptake, implementation of a new HPV vaccine (i.e., 9vHPV) could further complicate administration processes, thereby keeping uptake low. Therefore it is important to examine provider knowledge and attitudes regarding HPV vaccination and administration processes to maximally support uptake and, as a result, population health.

Healthcare provider (HCP) recommendation is one of the strongest predictors of vaccine uptake [9–11]. Furthermore, a lack of HCP recommendation is a primary reason for non-vaccination [12, 13]. The purpose of this study was to assess early HCP awareness of 9vHPV as well as identify questions HCPs might have regarding 9vHPV. It is important to ascertain provider knowledge, especially given the interchangeability of 4vHPV and 9vHPV in the ACIP recommendations and the confusion this may cause in conjunction with the

introduction of the new vaccine. Additionally, we wanted to ascertain any questions HCPs anticipate from parents and patients in order to assist them in addressing patient concerns.

Materials and methods

We conducted semi-structured in-person qualitative interviews from January to March, 2015. Qualitative methodology is ideal when exploring an area where little is known because it allows the investigators to identify, via in-depth analysis, relevant personal and contextual factors [14]. Participants were recruited from five urban community pediatric clinics in the Eskenazi Health System, which serves predominantly low-income patients in the Indianapolis area. Over 70% of this pediatric patient population is on Medicaid.

Interviews lasted 15–30 minutes, and participants were compensated with a gift card. Interview questions about 9vHPV centered on vaccine awareness, anticipated patient and parent questions, and general questions regarding the vaccine. Twenty-nine HCPs were eligible to be interviewed and 22 consented and completed the interview. Participants were recruited until saturation was reached, i.e., we were acquiring no new information from the interviews [15]. Interviews were digitally recorded then transcribed. Qualitative analysis was performed using inductive content analysis [16]. Transcripts of the interviews were read to identify meaningful themes, then two investigators independently coded each interview according to those themes. The codes were reviewed and areas of disagreement were resolved through discussion. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of Indiana University (Study No. 1408987170).

Results

Healthcare Provider 9vHPV Awareness

The sample consisted of 21 pediatricians and one pediatric nurse practitioner. They were mostly female (n=17) and averaged 14.1 years in practice. Twelve had heard of 9vHPV but six of these indicated they did not know much about it. Eight participants indicated they had not heard of 9vHPV and 2 stated they had “heard a rumor” but that they did not know much about it. For themes and exemplar quotes, see Table 1.

HCP Questions

When the HCPs were asked what questions they have about 9vHPV, they indicated they would like to know more about efficacy (n=7), side effects (n=6), added protection over 4vHPV (n=5), dosing schedule (n=5), cost (n=5), and safety (n=4). Some HCPs indicated that they would like general information either for their own knowledge or to help them answer questions from patients or parents (n=5). Additionally, four providers wanted to know when it would be available.

Anticipated Parent and Patient Questions

Twenty-one of the HCPs were asked if they thought patients or parents would have questions about 9vHPV. Eleven said they did not think they would have any questions at all. When asked why, four indicated they did not think patients or parents would have questions

beyond those they already have had about 4vHPV. These HCPs also noted that there were not any additional questions for the pneumococcal vaccine when it went from 7-valent to 13-valent. Furthermore, three indicated that patients do not understand the science behind vaccines enough to know the difference between valencies and therefore would not have any additional questions.

Interestingly, although the majority of HCPs indicated they did not expect questions about 9vHPV, most did go on to list possible questions patients might have. HCPs anticipated questions regarding side effects (n=9), effectiveness (n=3), and safety (n=3). Some thought parents would want to know if the new vaccine was really necessary or better than 4vHPV (n=5). Four of the HCPs (19%) thought that their patients would want long-term data due to perceived lack of real world experience with the new vaccine (see Table 1).

Discussion

HCP recommendation is one of the strongest predictors of HPV vaccine uptake. In this sample, just over half of HCPs were aware of the 9vHPV vaccine. Increasing HCP awareness of the licensing and recommendations for 9vHPV will be pivotal in increasing vaccine uptake. HCPs had questions about the vaccine mainly regarding efficacy, safety, side effects, cost, and dosing schedule. While the results indicate there is a need to increase HCP awareness, it is likely that as 9vHPV becomes more readily available, HCPs will become more aware of the vaccine through marketing and educational campaigns.

Most HCPs did not anticipate that parents or patients would have questions about 9vHPV. This finding is particularly interesting in light of a recent study by Fontenot *et al.* which found that parents had many questions about 9vHPV, including concerns about safety and whether yet another HPV vaccine might be developed in the near future [17]. However, the differences between what the providers in this study anticipated and what Fontenot *et al.* found could be due to different patient populations. The majority of participants in the Fontenot study were married, employed full time, and had at least some college education whereas the providers in this study serve economically disadvantaged populations. However, it is reasonable to infer that parents will have questions about a new HPV vaccine, given the negative media attention that arose with the first generation HPV vaccines [18, 19]. HCPs who did anticipate questions indicated there would potentially be questions from parents and patients regarding side effects, safety, effectiveness, and necessity of the vaccine. Now that 9vHPV is licensed and recommended, these results indicate a need to increase awareness and knowledge among HCPs. Given that physicians continue to hold misconceptions about 4vHPV, it will be particularly important to address areas of awareness and education regarding 9vHPV [20]. Additionally, there are unmet educational needs among HCPs regarding the new vaccine, specifically regarding safety, side effects, and efficacy. Furthermore, HCPs may also need assistance in anticipating and addressing patient questions.

This study is among the first to assess HCP awareness and questions regarding 9vHPV, but it has limitations. Participants were a convenience sample of HCPs in a health system that generally serves minority and economically disadvantaged patients, so responses may not be

representative of the broader experiences of HCPs. Selection bias might have occurred and the HCPs who agreed to participate might have different attitudes about vaccination than the participants who did not respond to recruitment e-mails.

Conclusions

HCPs have unmet educational needs regarding 9vHPV. HCPs need educational tools to anticipate and answer questions from parents and patients. To our knowledge, this is the first study to assess HCP awareness of 9vHPV licensing as well as questions HCPs have about the vaccine. Awareness of information deficits can help health systems and public health agencies create and target educational materials to provide information on the efficacy and safety of the new 9vHPV.

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Table

Concept	Theme	Exemplar Quotes	
<i>HPV Vaccine Awareness</i>	Aware (n=12)	"I've heard of it but I haven't gotten a lot of literature about it." "Yes. Can't wait for it to come to my clinics."	
	Does not know much (n=6)	"I might have heard something about it, but I am not terribly familiar with it." "I have [heard of HPV9], but honestly I don't know that much about it."	
	Unaware (n=8)	"No. But honestly I don't even know what the current one is." "I don't think I've heard about anything new regarding any sort of HPV vaccine."	
	Heard a Rumor (n=2)	"Vaguely, yes, I've heard rumors"	
	<i>HCP Questions</i>	Efficacy (n=7)	"Just as long as it's equally efficacious and I believe it is."
		Side Effects (n=6)	"Just the adverse side effects for my patients and making sure that they're knowledgeable about it."
		Additional Protection (n=5)	"How much more coverage do you get against all the different types of HPV that cause cervical cancer?"
		Dosing Schedule (n=5)	"Do you have any idea what the recommended dosing schedule for that one is; is it also three vaccinations?"
		Cost (n=5)	"I'm waiting to see the degree at which cost will impact its availability, so whether that's going to affect our ability to stock it in clinic or whether patients will have the differential coverage for it from their insurers based on whether they're getting the Quadrivalent or Nanovalent."
		General Information (n=5)	"I just want to look at that information myself. I just haven't done it yet." "I don't feel like I know a lot about it right now, so I think that would be the main thing is just getting informed about it."
<i>Anticipated parent/patient questions</i>	Safety (n=4)	"I guess with vaccines you always --as a provider when you're counseling people on it, you want to make sure you know about safety, side effects, everything."	
	Parents will not have questions (n=11)	"No I don't think so. I think that they trust in me so that if recommend a vaccine that they know that it is something that their child needs."	
	No more than HPV4 questions (n=4)	R: "I don't know that the 9-valent will have any more questions by parents." INT: "As opposed...as compared to the quadrivalent?" R: "Yes."	
	Lack of scientific understanding (n=3)	"I don't think it's going to bring up any new questions because it's not a totally new vaccine. It's the same vaccine, just more parts to it because nothing really happened when we switched from 7 to 13 on the pneumococcal. Nobody questions it." "No. I think for my clinic population I would say no. That's just based on other vaccine modifications that haven't spurred any increase in questions about the strains. I got a lot	

Concept	Theme	Exemplar Quotes
		more questions about Thimerosal and whether that's included versus like the actual, what's included in the vaccine from a scientific standpoint, if that makes any sense."
<i>Anticipated Questions</i>		
	Side Effects (n=9)	"If there's any side-effects to worry about. That's usually the biggest one."
	Safety (n=3)	"I think parents are more concerned about safety than they are even about efficacy and what it prevents, and how helpful it is."
	Effectiveness (n=3)	"I think they'd have the same questions [as the physician], like does it --how well does it work and what are the side effects, how safe is it?"
	Necessity of Vaccination (n=5)	"They'll want to know about how—some of them will ask how long has it been given? Is it necessary? Is it better? Is it—that kind of thing."
	Long-term Data (n=4)	"Probably the same in regards to what would happen if they take this vaccination and potentially what would happen in the next five years after receiving it."