

Conference: Silence and Articulation

Title: Human Papillomavirus (HPV): Are HPV vaccines a safe and effective management strategy for Cervical Cancer disease in Australia?

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Abstract

Objective: Did the risk of cervical cancer to Australian women prior to the introduction of a vaccine justify the risk of introducing this medical procedure? In 2007 cervical cancer was not considered a significant risk to the majority of Australian women. The mortality rate at this time was 1.9 women /100,000 and it is a disease which is almost 100% curable with early detection from Pap smear screening.

Method: This is a literature review of the science used to suggest an HPV vaccine would prevent cervical cancer and of the aggressive marketing campaign used to sell the vaccine. The marketing campaign was funded by the manufacturing company and presented by doctors using company slides. It led to Merck being awarded the title of 'Pharmaceutical Company of the Year' for creating a 'market out of thin air'.

Results: HPV infection is a necessary factor in most cervical cancer but it is not sufficient to initiate cancer. Environmental and lifestyle co-factors are necessary in cervical cancer development. There are also 20 HPV viruses associated with cancer and the HPV vaccine only protects against 2. Testing this vaccine in women 16 -26 years of age was not an appropriate surrogate because pre-cancerous lesions in this age group rarely lead to cancer.

Conclusions: The benefits of this vaccine have not been established and there are side-effects from the vaccine in an unknown number of women. The inadequacies in the science used to promote this vaccine have serious implications for the health of women.