

HPV Vaccine Decision Making in Pediatric Primary Care: A Semi-Structured Interview Study

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BACKGROUND: Despite national recommendations, as of 2009 human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination rates were low with < 30% of adolescent girls fully vaccinated. Research on barriers to vaccination has focused separately on parents, adolescents, or clinicians and not on the decision making process among all participants at the point of care. By incorporating three distinct perspectives, we sought to generate hypotheses to inform interventions to increase vaccine receipt.

METHODS: Between March and June, 2010, we conducted qualitative interviews with 20 adolescent-mother-clinician triads (60 individual interviews) directly after a preventive visit with the initial HPV vaccine due. Interviews followed a guide based on published HPV literature, involved 9 practices, and continued until saturation of the primary themes was achieved. Purposive sampling balanced adolescent ages and practice type (urban resident teaching versus non-teaching). Using a modified grounded theory approach, we analyzed data with NVivo8 software both within and across triads to generate primary themes.

RESULTS: The study population was comprised of 20 mothers (12 Black, 9 < high school diploma), 20 adolescents (ten 11-12 years old), and 20 clinicians (16 female). Nine adolescents received the HPV vaccine at the visit, eight of whom were African American. Among the 11 not vaccinated, all either concurrently received or were already up-to-date on Tdap and MCV4. We did not observe systematic patterns of vaccine acceptance or refusal based on adolescent age or years of clinician experience. We identified 3 themes: (1) Parents delayed, rather than refused vaccination, and when they expressed reluctance, clinicians were hesitant to engage them in discussion. (2) Clinicians used one of two strategies to present the HPV vaccine, either presenting it as a routine vaccine with no additional information or presenting it as optional and highlighting risks and benefits. (3) Teens considered themselves passive participants in decision making, even when parents and clinicians reported including them in the process.

CONCLUSIONS: Programs to improve HPV vaccine delivery in primary care should focus on promoting effective parent-clinician communication. Research is needed to evaluate strategies to help clinicians engage reluctant parents and passive teens in discussion and measure the impact of distinct clinician decision making approaches on HPV vaccine delivery.

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Authors:

Hughs CC, Jones AL, Feemster KA, Fiks AG.

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