HUMAN PAPILLOMA VIRUS VACCINE

Ethics Case

HPV, or human papilloma virus, is a family of viruses known to cause genital warts and infections that, in some cases, can lead to cervical cancer later in life. The virus is easily transmitted by intimate physical contact; HPV infection is common among sexually-active individuals (approximately >30%). In the US, about 6 million people, including teens, become infected with HPV each year, and 4,000 women die from cervical cancer.

The US Food & Drug Administration (FDA) has approved two vaccines to prevent HPV infection for girls ages 9-26. The national professional association for pediatricians- the American Academy of Pediatrics- recommends that girls receive HPV vaccination around age 11 or 12. That’s because this is the age at which the vaccine produces the best immune response in the body, and because it’s important to protect girls well before the onset of sexual activity.

Dr. Top, a pediatrician, is uncomfortable with recommending HPV vaccination for teens. Dr. Top believes that providing vaccinations removes a good reason for teens to NOT have premarital sex. A parent of a patient wants to know if she should vaccinate her daughter. What are Dr. Top’s ethical obligations for talking with this parent?

Related questions to consider:

If you were the child, what would you want Dr. Top to tell you?

If you were the parent, what would you want Dr. Top to tell you?

Student Responses

11-19-11

I agree with Dr. Top, but I also think that I would want to be aware of all the options I have. Everyone has their own values and some include pre or post marital sex. Majority of the teens in the United States have become accustomed to sex before marriage and I think it’s important for them to have this vaccine. I believe most parents would want their children to have it in case they make some stupid mistake. They’ll be protected and that’s always comforting to a parent. However like Dr. Top said, it will promote premarital sex and encourage teens to go ahead with it since there won’t be any health issues in the long run. Although most people would love this vaccine, I think it would be better for the parents of the child to know about this first. They can decide if it’s necessary or not based on what kind of person he or she is. If the teen is sexually active then there’s no question in getting the vaccine, but if they have decided to wait until marriage then there is no need to get it unless it’s absolutely necessary.

T.Z. – Plano West Senior High School
I would expect the doctor would give me the shot and say that I will be protected with HPV and not be infected. And not having cancer and die of cervical cancer later in life, and not be the 6 million people including teens that get infected each year. I want him to tell me why would it be bad for him/her and why is the reason, if other doctor agree to the vaccine to fight against HPV, and even FDA said that it prevent it to happen, and state where he got his ideas and why does it remove a reason for teens not to have HPV.

J.H.

I think that the doctor should tell the parent that the vaccine would only give the child more chances of getting into a sexual relationship and that she may think that by having the vaccine she would be protected of all things, but the truth is that she is only protected to papilloma. If I was the parent I would like the doctor to tell me the truth and what he thinks is best for my daughter and what would keep her protected. If I was the child I would rather like for him to tell me that It is better for me to not have it then to have it because at the age of 11 or 12, I am not able to make the good decisions as an adult.

J.V.-South Garland High School

The ethical obligations of Dr. Top would be to tell the parents of the child all the pros about the vaccination. Dr. Top shouldn't tell the parents about his views about the vaccination because it is his view and other people may view it differently, but if the parents asked Dr. Top about his views on the vaccination he could tell them his opinions about the vaccination. If I were a child I would like Dr. Top to tell me the pros of the Vaccine but also the cons without his personal opinion. I would want to know what good things the vaccination could help me with. If I were a parent I would like him to tell me what is best for my child which would probably be the vaccination because it would help my children to be safe from a disease which may lead to cancer.

U.T.- Jack E. Singley Academy

If you were the child, what would you want Dr. Top to tell you? I will like to hear is that they have a
solution and I will survive with the vaccine. If you were the parent, what would you want Dr. Top to tell you? I will like to hear is that my child will survive and the vaccine will help him live longer.

J.P.- Jack E. Singley Academy

10-25-11

In the case known as HPV, if I was to be the child I would like for the doctor, Mr. Top to tell me all the benefits of the HPV vaccine. I would also want Mr. Top to let me know if waited until I was older and did have sexual activity with the vaccine still help at all. Something else I would like for the doctor to inform me is if there's another way to reduce the risk of obtaining HPV, other than the vaccine.

If I was to be the parent, I would like for Mr. Top to explain to me first of all if adding up the HPV vaccine to my child's immune system may cause a dangerous side effect or not. I would also like to be informed from Mr. Top if it's only in this country where HPV is known to be around. It's also necessary for him to inform me if it has even been proven for the vaccine to actually prevent or reduce the risk of getting HPV. Something else I don't want the doctor to miss to tell me is that if the vaccine is more dangerous than the HPV itself.

E.R.-South Garland High School

10-25-11

Dr. Top would tell the parent how he/she personally feels, that having the vaccine might give the parents daughter a reason not to have pre-marital sex. I would want the doctor to tell me the side effects of the vaccine and when would it expire and how many types of diseases it protects against. I would want Dr. Top to tell me everything he/she knows. I would want to know how many shots my daughter would need a year. I would want the dr. to tell me how the vaccine affects the way she acts, the side effects, the main thing it prevents and all other diseases.

E.R.

10-25-11

If I were the doctor I would tell the mother: The Human Papilloma Virus is a very serious disease that can be transmitted through intimate physical contact, everyone should get it but not only so that they can be safe but so that other people around them can be safe too. This vaccine does not prevent all types of STD’s that can be acquired through intimate contact but it helps prevent cervical cancer in women.
If I were the mother I would like to know if... my child can have serious side effects from this vaccine. Also, if it works accurately, if you are going to get vaccine you should make sure it works efficiently so that it is actually worth it to be vaccinated, what if someone with the HPV vaccine still got the virus? If I were the daughter I would like to know if I am safe from the virus. I would like to know if my body can respond weird or reject the vaccine which would cause me some pain or discomfort. Also I would ask if I would have to repeat the vaccine more than once, if I do I would want to know the dates so that in case my mother forgets I can always remind her so that I don’t restart the dosage.

A.G.

10-24-11

I believe that it is the doctor's responsibility to recommend the vaccination to the parent regardless of the doctors believe. The doctor should advise the parent of the benefits and possible side effects and let the parent make the decision. I would want the doctor to tell me about the vaccination because I would want to stay safe and protected at all times. I would want the doctor to tell me about every option available to protect my child from diseases regardless if I choose to take them.

E.P.-Jack E. Singley Academy

10-24-11

First doctor Top must tell the parent how effective the vaccine is. Dr. Top must give the parent his personal opinion on the subject, but at the same give a professional point of view so that the parent's attitude toward vaccinating his/her child will not be changed by the doctor's personal advice. If the parent is sure that the child will lead a sexually active lifestyle he also has the obligation to educate the parent and child on how to prevent infectious diseases and pregnant.

If I was the child I would ask Dr. Top to tell me how the vaccine will be beneficial for me or which are the odds of the vaccine to fail. If I was the parent I would ask Dr. Top to convince my child of not having sex. Sometimes young people look up to professionals and authorities other than their parents and if they give advice to them they will follow it. I do not approve the practice of premarital sex and therefore wouldn't want to have my child vaccinated against STD's because that would promote an early sexual experience.

A.R. - South Texas High School for Health Professions

10-24-11
Dr. Top's obligations aren't to tell the parent her opinion about the vaccine but if she does, I don't see anything wrong with that. I personally disagree with Dr. Top because if my child were to get raped and she didn't have the vaccine because I wanted her to wait to have sex until marriage, then I would blame myself for the disease she has now because of the rape. If I were the child, I would want Dr. Top to tell me if there are any bad side effects from taking this vaccine. If I were the parent, I would want Dr. Top to tell me if this vaccine was completely safe and if it actually worked.

D.T.-South Texas High School for Health Professions

10-23-11

It is not the Doctor or Pharmacist’s choice to force a patient to take a medicine or to force them not to take it. Their jobs are as advisers. Although they should give their opinion and outlook on the situation, telling a parent to keep their child from taking any vaccine. The doctor should present all MEDICAL risks, however, if a child feels that they will have sex, then that should be confidential, not openly discussed with a parent. If, however, the parent asks the doctor to put his position aside, and directly asks about premarital sex, THEN the doctor has the right to give his thoughts on the matter. Furthermore, a child should have the right to be protected even if they are engaging in immoral activity. If the parent is discouraged from giving the vaccine, and the child is then raped by, or mistakenly engages in sexual activity with someone HPV positive, and the parent decided not to protect the child who was bound to do so with, or without the vaccine, then a whole series of problems is created all because the mother was afraid to give her child an option to have premarital sex. So in summary, to be completely open with a parent of the risks of morality, will be to condemn the child to death. The only right choice is to say as little to the parent as possible, and let the child choose their own paths.

J.W.-Aubrey ISD

10-23-11

I would want to know what the standard precautions/procedures are, likeliness of HPV, effects of the vaccination, and if there is any way to possibly stop the virus. I would want to know why a vaccination is preferred, the likelihood of HPV, the effects of the vaccination, the possibility of revaccination, and if there are any other ways to stop the virus.
A.K. South Texas High School for Health Professions

10-23-11

Dr. Top has to tell the parent everything about the vaccine. Things such as the disease that the vaccine...
is for, and the pros as well as cons of the vaccine should be told to the parent.

If I was the child, I would want Dr. Top to tell me what the vaccine protects me against, as well as some of its side effects. I would also like to know not only the name of the disease (HPV), but also its symptoms. I would not necessarily want to know the ways of contracting the disease, as this would encourage premarital sex. If I was the parent, I would expect to be told the risks of the vaccine, not only medical risks, but social risks as well. I would also expect more background on the disease, how it is acquired, etc.

KS.-South Texas High School for Health Professions

10-23-11

If I were the child, I would want Dr. Top to tell me about the existing vaccine. I would like for him to explain to me the purpose of the medication and if it has been proven to work, I would also want to know his reasoning for not recommending the vaccine so I can take into consideration his own reasoning along with the facts he has given me.

If I were the parent in this scenario, I would like to be notified about the existing vaccine. If Dr. Top did not feel comfortable talking about the medication with me I would ask him to refer my child and me to a physician that would be happy to discuss both the pros and the cons of giving my child the vaccine. If Dr. Top did feel comfortable talking with me I would ask him to only give me the information on the vaccine and not his opinions.

M.K.B.

10-23-11

Dr. Top should give the parent and daughter the option for the girl to be vaccinated, even if they feel uncomfortable about it. What the doctor should do is speak to both the parent and the daughter about the positives and negatives of the vaccine, and explain why she feels uncomfortable giving it. If the parent is okay with it, the doctor should talk to the daughter about how even though this vaccine would protect her from some diseases if she were to have pre-marital sex, she could still get other STDs. If I were the daughter I would want to know what effects it would have on me and what all it would protect me from. If I were the parent, I would want to know basically the same thing. If the vaccine could protect my daughter from some things and it wouldn't have a negative effect on her. I would probably want her to have it. But, it would be the doctor's responsibility to explain everything to the parent and child and not leave anything out.

M.K.E.
10-10-11

I believe that the cure should be administered, but at the same time it is the parents job to teach the correct morals to their children: not to have premarital sex

P.F.