

HUMAN PAPILLOMAVIRUS AWARENESS



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Introduction

It is estimated that in Europe, 1 woman dies of cervical cancer every 18 minutes.¹ Cervical cancer is mostly caused by Human Papillomavirus (HPV). Both genders globally are affected by this sexually transmitted disease (STD).² Moreover, research also claims that engaging in risky sexual relationships increases the chance of acquiring a HPV infection.^{2,3}

Objectives

- Investigate women's and health care professionals' (HCP) knowledge on HPV.
- Explore women's awareness about the association of HPV and cervical cancer.
- Investigate women's and HCP awareness of the HPV vaccines.

Method

Two self-administered questionnaires, The Women's awareness questionnaire^{4,5} and the Doctors' and Pharmacists' awareness questionnaire, were designed, developed, and psychometrically evaluated. The Doctors' and Pharmacists' awareness questionnaire was distributed to 116 pharmacists, 129 general practitioners (GPs) and 35 gynaecological doctors. The Women's awareness questionnaire was distributed to 500 adolescent females, young females and patients visiting gynaecological clinics. Statistical analysis was carried out using descriptive statistics and the chi-square test on SPSS® v 19.0.

The setting of this project involved: 85 community pharmacies, 2 health centres, 2 private clinics, 4 educational institutions, Gynaecology Outpatients and Obstetrics and Gynaecology ward, Mater Dei Hospital.

Results

A response rate of 91 % (n=457) was obtained for the Women's awareness questionnaire and 76 (66%) pharmacists, 40 GPs (31%) and 20 (57%) gynaecological doctors returned the HCP questionnaire. Only 37.2% and 44.4% of the female participants were aware of HPV and the HPV vaccines respectively, with the majority being older, married and educated females. Only 38.5% of the females knew that HPV is associated with cervical cancer, and worryingly, 58.4% think that barrier contraceptives may prevent HPV transmission. Figure 1 shows the significant association between sexual activity and HPV awareness ($p=0.005$).

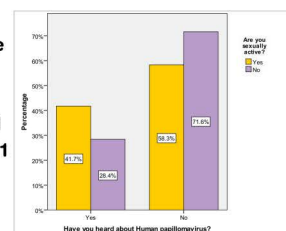


Figure 1: Relationship between sexual activity and knowledge on HPV (p=0.005).

In the HCP questionnaire, 40% of HCP are aware of the correct dosing schedule for both vaccines locally available whilst 82.4% incorrectly think that barrier contraceptives may prevent HPV transmission. Most of the HCP thought that 9 – 15 year old girls and all sexually active women should be vaccinated more than others. The majority of females and HCP think that the vaccines should be introduced in the Local Health Service. Both females and HCP think that the family doctor, schools and pharmacists should create more awareness about HPV.

Discussion

- In accordance with other studies, only the minority of females was aware of HPV and the vaccines available, and these were mostly older, married and educated females.
- The low awareness about the association between HPV and cervical cancer and also about the vaccines is consistent with other studies^{6,7}.
- HCP had a good understanding and knowledge regarding HPV and the vaccines available. However, they seemed to think that the two vaccines have the same dosing schedule.
- Moreover, HCP incorrectly think that barrier contraceptives may prevent HPV transmission, and thus, they might give wrong information to their patients.

Conclusion

It is suggested that more awareness is required in order to reach those females who are still unaware of this virus let alone its complications and its link to cervical cancer, especially females who are at a higher risk of getting infected with HPV. The overall knowledge of the HCP regarding HPV and the vaccines should be improved such that correct information is provided to society.

References

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