

Development of a community pharmacy human papillomavirus vaccine program for underinsured university students along the United States/Mexico border

Jacquelyn P. Navarrete, Margie E. Padilla, Louise P. Castro, and José O. Rivera

Abstract

Objective: To describe the development and implementation of a human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine patient assistance program (PAP) for university students, and to acquire information on the number who accessed the program and completed the series.

Setting: University of Texas at El Paso University Student Health Clinic Pharmacy, Fall 2011–Spring 2014.

Practice description: A community pharmacy located within the university student health clinic providing services to an underinsured student population.

Practice innovation: Existing evidence shows the benefit of using PAP in community pharmacies but is nonspecific regarding the use of PAP for vaccines in an uninsured and underinsured Hispanic student population. The implementation of this unique HPV vaccine program in a community setting aims to increase awareness, access, and rates.

Main outcome measures: Primary measures included results from a needs-assessment questionnaire that were used to implement the HPV vaccine program. After implementation, utilization data were collected on the number of students who qualified and enrolled in the HPV PAP and the number of students who completed the HPV series.

Results: The preliminary data from a needs assessment indicated that a majority (72.1%, $n = 80$) of students did not understand how HPV is transmitted. A total of 89 students qualified for PAP. The majority were women (81%). A total of 71 students (79.8%) received their second dose and 43 (48.3%) completed the series.

Conclusion: Although pharmacists continue to provide vaccine services, minorities such as the Hispanic population continue to be underimmunized. Students may not be taking the proper precautions to prevent the acquisition of HPV. For these reasons services such as this HPV vaccine program are warranted. Pharmacists need to continue to educate and advocate on the importance of vaccines and how they prevent disease.

Keywords: Community pharmacists, patient assistance program, vaccines, human papillomavirus, Hispanic, underserved, underinsured.

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Providing affordable and accessible vaccination services for a target population, such as university students, is a niche for community pharmacists. Community pharmacies continue to be well-positioned to increase vaccination rates. The use of a patient assistance program (PAP) in a community setting is an innovative way to facilitate the affordability and accessibility of vaccines such as the quadrivalent human papillomavirus (HPV-4) vaccine. Clinical pharmacy services within a university setting provide an opportunity for accessible care.

HPV is the most common sexually transmitted infection and is responsible for causing genital warts, cervical cancer, anal cancer, and other types of cancer and precancer.^{1,2} One in two sexually active people will contract HPV at least once in their lifetime, according to estimates.^{1,2} HPV-associated cancers were responsible for 3.3% of all cancer cases in women and 2.0% in men diagnosed in 2009. Cervical cancer incidence was the highest reported among the HPV-associated cancers for women (53.4%) and oropharyngeal cancer for men (78.2%). Despite the advancement of vaccines, cervical cancer continues to be highest in low-income women, particularly racial and ethnic minorities, including Hispanics.^{3,4}

At a Glance

Synopsis: This article describes a human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine program for university students that used a patient assistance program (PAP) focused on uninsured and underinsured Hispanic students. The results of a questionnaire demonstrated that a majority of the students did not understand how HPV is transmitted and therefore were likely not taking the proper precautions to prevent acquisition, either because of a lack of education, access to the vaccine, or financial inability. Pharmacists are urged to continue to educate and advocate on the importance of vaccines and how they prevent disease.

Analysis: HPV is the most common sexually transmitted infection and is responsible for causing several types of cancer and precancer. One in two sexually active people will contract HPV at least once in their lifetime. Despite the advancement of vaccines, cervical cancer continues to be highest in low-income women, particularly racial and ethnic minorities, including Hispanics. One reason for low HPV vaccination rates is a missed clinical opportunity, and university students are in a unique environment for pharmacists to provide and administer the vaccine—an innovative model for community pharmacy practice. Pharmacists and student health centers are in a unique position to help increase completion rates for HPV vaccination. The completion rate of this program was higher than recent national rates, offering hope that a greater number of cases of cervical cancer can be avoided.

In 2011, approximately 30% of women between the ages of 19 and 26 years received one or more doses of HPV vaccine. Hispanic women in this survey demonstrated lower rates of vaccination, with only 20.2% receiving at least one dose.⁵ Factors such as inadequate provider recommendations, provider reimbursement, infrequent use of reminder/recall systems, parental hesitancy, and lack of health care access, may have contributed to lower vaccination rates.³ Current research also indicates that Hispanic women living in Texas along the border with Mexico have a higher incidence of cervical cancer and lower cervical cancer screening rates compared with women in the rest of the United States.⁶ Statistics such as these provide justification for the importance of HPV vaccination promotion.

Currently, there are two vaccines approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA)—quadrivalent HPV-4 vaccine (Gardasil—Merck) and bivalent HPV-2 vaccine (Cervarix—GlaxoSmithKline). These offer protection against most common strains of HPV.^{7,8}

In a recent report published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), one of the most common reasons for low HPV vaccination rates is from a missed clinical opportunity.⁹ University students are in a closed health care system that allows for a unique opportunity for pharmacists to provide and administer the vaccine. There are many reasons why vaccine-eligible patients do not receive vaccines before entering the university. Some of them include parental resistance, discomfort in talking to parents/adolescents about sexual behaviors, and/or lack of time by providers to talk to parents/adolescents about HPV and HPV vaccines.¹⁰ Without barriers such as parental resistance or discomfort regarding education on sex behaviors, university students with appropriate education and awareness may be more likely to request the vaccine. This provides an excellent opportunity for community pharmacists in a university setting to educate patients about HPV and administer the vaccine.

Objectives

The objectives of this practice innovation were to describe the development and implementation of an HPV vaccine PAP for university students and to acquire information on the number of students who accessed the HPV vaccine and completed the series.

Approval from the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) Institutional Review Board (IRB #306744-1) was obtained for a retrospective review of the needs-assessment questionnaire (see Appendix A, available in the Supplemental Content section on JAPhA.org) and the prospective analysis of the students enrolled in the HPV vaccine program.

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