



The HPV Vaccine and Aboriginal Communities

Project 192: Investigating cross-cultural responses to the introduction of the Human papillomavirus [HPV] vaccine

What's the project about?

The aim of the project was to identify issues among parents and guardians from three cultures in Australia, as well as General Practitioners (GPs) in Victoria and Aboriginal Health Workers (AHWs) in Central Australia and Victoria, towards the HPV vaccine. The project focused on three sample populations from Anglo, Chinese and Aboriginal descent. The vaccine—which is highly effective against the sexually transmitted HPV—is controversial because it is most effective when given to girls before sexual activity begins. It was important to understand the attitudes of consenting parents, GPs and AHWs in order to find the best ways to educate different communities and administer the vaccine in those communities. This will reduce opportunities for misunderstanding and misinterpreting the key message.

Who's involved?

- The University of Melbourne
- Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO)
- PapScreen Victoria
- Northern Territory Department of Health and Community Services (NT DHCS)
- Division of General Practice (Vic.)
- Chinese Women's Association (Box Hill, Vic.)

- Victorian Cytology Service
- Royal Women's Hospital, Melbourne
- Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne
- CRC for Aboriginal Health

Outcomes

- The participation of two Aboriginal regions in the study resulted in high levels of vaccine uptake and empowered health professionals, particularly AHWs, working in the regions. As a result, AHWs were able to educate their communities appropriately at the time of HPV vaccine mass immunisation.
- The research found that the education resources developed for the Northern Territory were not appropriate culturally or linguistically for the Central Australian population. As a direct result of this finding, the NT DHCS committed funding to develop resources in five languages common to the Central Australian region, which will be driven by the study's Aboriginal Advisory and Field Supervisors.
- Resources for the Victorian Aboriginal population were also developed concurrently by Victorian Aboriginal Study Advisor, Peta Reynolds. The material supported the AHWs in Central Australia who used the fact sheet for community education.



Members of the Central Australian Advisory Group: Kirsty Smith, Julie Wright, Tania Passi, Sandi McElligot, LeShay Maidment (above)

Implications of findings for policy and practice

Preventative Health Education: It is imperative for disease prevention and the reduction of burden of disease that health messages about preventative measures be culturally differentiated. Nor can we generalise that resources developed for one culture are going to satisfy the needs of the total population within that cultural group. This requires customised approaches including: (i) appropriate lead times for the development of culturally appropriate educational materials, and (ii) involvement of the target community in all stages of the resource development, education of the community and implementation of the health intervention.

Recognition for Advisory Groups: Formal recognition as equal research partners through professional and financial avenues needs to be given to the advisors who are external and additional to the core research team. The demands placed on cultural advisors to this research, especially the Aboriginal Advisory Groups, are not formally recognised under existing research frameworks and practices.

Ethics: It is imperative at ethics approval phases of the research that representatives from the cultural groups to be sampled are included in the membership of the ethics review committee. Modifications to the original methodology were necessary to ensure success within the Aboriginal population. This required additional ethics approvals and adjustments to the study timeline.

The project commenced in late 2004 when the HPV vaccine was at late stage 3 trials with an expectation that licensure and public availability to Australian communities would occur in 2008. The data collection and analysis was completed in 2007 with the final report due mid-2008.

HPV resources in five languages

After presenting the research findings at the 2007 Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) Conference in Alice Springs, members of the Central Australian Advisory Group, along with Peta Reynolds and principal researcher Margaret Heffernan, met with representatives of the NT Department of Health and Community Services who pledged financial support for the development of HPV resources in five Central Australian languages. The project was also recognised at the PHAA conference with Margaret Heffernan, OAM, awarded the PHERT 2007 Postgraduate Scholarship for this research.



To find out more
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