

Addressing the Need for HPV Vaccination in Minorities through Community Outreach

Background:

In the United States, Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is a leading cause of oropharyngeal cancer. Studies have shown that like many HPV-mediated cancers, this cancer is highly preventable through vaccination. Despite this, vaccination rates remain low, with minority groups experiencing significantly lower rates compared to the national average. The reason for this may be multifactorial, owing to historically limited healthcare access and representation, strong cultural beliefs, and lack of targeted health education.

The consequences of these low vaccination rates may be dire and may lead to a higher incidence of oropharyngeal cancers. Along with the fact these individuals tend to be uninsured or underinsured, this possibility represents not only a burden for the health of the individual, but also increases the burden to an already strained healthcare system while amplifying healthcare disparities.

Target population: The primary audiences are college and graduate students in the age range of 18-26. This is an important target population as the efficacy of HPV vaccinations decreases substantially after this age. However, recommendations can still be made for adults aged 27 through 45 per CDC recommendations.

Methods:

We aim to begin addressing this disparity in vaccination rates by promoting vaccine awareness and coordinating visit with college aged students from the local community. In partnership with the University of Minnesota (UoM) Rochester, we anticipate holding an educational health fair informing students about the link between HPV and various cancers as well as the available HPV vaccine which can significantly reduce the risk of disease. The program will focus on educating on the risks associated with tobacco use and alcohol use in addition to HPV vaccination. The UoM Rochester serves over 1000 students, allowing for high impact from this event. Over 25% of the students at this institution are of racially underserved backgrounds and the highest graduation rate is seen among Hispanic or Latino males. This in mind, we aim to connect with students by having a diverse group of experts at the fair who not only reflect the patients demographically but can help connect students to vaccine services after the fair. We hope to have informational sessions as well as instructional sessions on primary and secondary prevention measures. Resources will be provided for students including free or low-cost vaccination opportunities for those who may not have access to care. Students will have the opportunity to learn about the existing treatment modalities and prognosis of disease as well as gain an understanding of ongoing research efforts within the field. Our ongoing relationship with Jenny Casper, MA, Director of Community Engagement and Career Development at the UoM Rochester Campus will be assisting us with this event.

Expected Outcomes:

We learned from the cervical cancer awareness program that action for cancer prevention can start in the vaccination booth. The success of this program demonstrates that with adequate communication, early education, and targeting of at-risk populations, desired vaccination rates can be achieved within a reasonable timeframe. However, it also highlights the importance of policy support, monitoring and adaptation of research strategies, and that collaboration between multiple stakeholders is key. Here, we hope to educate and inform students about head and neck cancer, provide insight on prevention measures, offer strong recommendations for HPV vaccinations, and begin a dialog for understanding cancer prevention within the local community. We hope that in doing so, we can increase vaccination rates and preventative actions within the student body. Moreover, bringing attention to the uprise in HPV mediated oropharyngeal cancer can spark conversation among the community. We hope that students will share what they learn with their family members and friends, creating a wave of education that extends far beyond the walls of UoM Rochester. By bringing experts in the field on campus to discuss treatment and prognosis, we hope to expose the students to the field of oncology and the various providers and healthcare workers members involved in HNC care.

Impact:

To achieve adequate vaccination rates across the board, we must rise up to the challenge and address critical issues. This can be done by providing culturally sensitive information, overcoming language barriers, and building trust in medical recommendations. As two minority medical students involved in a URiM program, we believe that our voices could carry a message to minority students that might not otherwise be heard by medical professionals with the same message, but who lack the same background and experiences that minorities, like ourselves, have lived. Trust is initially built when you feel safe with someone and if we can build this bridge then our primary goal to increase awareness, dispel myths, and facilitate access to vaccination services could be obtained. We anticipate that through this community outreach event we will make an impact within the University of Minnesota Rochester Campus students, particularly minority students, and promote long-term oropharyngeal cancer prevention through HPV vaccination and education. Since the University of Minnesota Rochester branch is dedicated to the medical science fields, we feel this is also an opportunity to share our pathways to a career in medicine firsthand.

Cost:

For this event, we expect expenditures of no more than \$750. We anticipate spending \$200 on flyers, education materials and handouts, \$100 on promotional efforts and advertisement posters, \$200 on tabling and booth setup and \$250 on snacks and beverages.

Funding:

No other funding sources have been secured for this event.