Focus on Prevention

Silver City Health Center Promotes HPV Vaccine

KAMU, SEVEN OF ITS MEMBER CLINICS AND SEVERAL HEALTH DEPARTMENTS IN KANSAS ARE TAKING PART IN A PRIVATELY FUNDED PROGRAM TO REDUCE THE INCIDENCE OF CERVICAL CANCER IN WOMEN.

SCHC staff (from left): Graciela Alcantar, Mary Virden, Esperanza Leyva, Rocio Gomez, Kary Weybrew and Ed Galan.

Last year, the Health Care Foundation of Greater Kansas City and REACH Healthcare Foundation made grants totaling $2.5 million to provide the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine voluntarily for qualified females in Kansas and Missouri. Participating clinics are distributing the vaccine at no cost to eligible patients between the ages of nine and 26.

KU Health Partners/Silver City Health Center (SCHC) in Kansas City, Kan., is one of the KAMU clinics involved in the project. Patients at SCHC and their parents have been grateful for the program.

"They feel very fortunate to receive the vaccine when they couldn't have afforded it on their own," said Mary Virden, MSEd, RN, SCHC's administrator and KU Health Partners' director of Clinical Services.

"This vaccine is one of the biggest advances we're going to see in our lifetime on the gynecological front," said Kary Weybrew, RN, case manager. That's why she and the rest of the SCHC staff are exploring ways to extend the vaccine to as many patients as possible and to make it an integral part of the services they offer to girls and women.

One 21-year-old patient, for example, didn't know the vaccine was available, but she received it when she visited for a diabetes check-up.

"We do everything we can to take care of the whole person, which includes getting people the vaccinations they need," said Ed Galan, MSN, SCHC director of Clinical Services. "In this case, the patient didn't come in for the vaccine, but it will help insure her overall health. She was thankful to receive it."

For the staff at SCHC, administering the HPV vaccine is not the end of the story – it's just the beginning of a larger tale about prevention, patient and parent education, and successful communication between providers and their clients.

For the initial launch of the project in October 2007, SCHC sent bilingual postcards to all established clients who are eligible for the vaccine. They have had a good response from patients in the nine to 18-year-old group.

"This is exciting because we ideally want to vaccinate children at an age before they enter sexual relations," said Weybrew. However, the vaccine is also effective for sexually active females, even if they already have a form of HPV, because it covers four strains of the virus. According to Weybrew, studies show that very few people have even two of the covered virus strains. That makes it important to reach females ages 18-26.

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In order to get the word out to more of their patients about the vaccine's availability, Silver City is designing a research project in collaboration with the Department of Preventive Medicine at the University of Kansas medical school. Students in the program will gather more information for SCHC about the effectiveness of the information they have given patients, then they will develop new materials the clinic can use to address a variety of communication challenges.

"We need to know more about our clients' literacy and health literacy levels," Galan explained, noting that successful communication involves more than language. "We need to provide them information that is culturally appropriate as well. Among newly immigrated people, for example, mothers might have a different outlook on talking about this type of vaccine, or the subject may be totally taboo. We need to understand how to best approach the clients that we serve, whether they are Anglo, African American or Hispanic."

The medical students will also develop a process for SCHC to monitor the outcomes of their HPV vaccine project.