**Human Papillomavirus vaccination practices and effect on routine cervical cancer screening by Kansas family physicians**

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Embarking on a research project won’t always lead to miraculous medical discoveries. It’s just as important to learn the process it takes to correctly perform research, such as conducting literature reviews, analyzing data, and presenting findings. For five recent graduates, their Health of the Public research project was about the journey.

It’s widely known the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) can lead to cervical cancer, and a vaccine can help prevent it. While the vaccine covers the most common and dangerous strains, it doesn’t cover all of the strains that are known. So the research group of Amanda Baxa, MD; Laura Platt, MD; Tessa Rohrberg, MD; Lauren Rowland, MD; and Dana Vietti, MD, was interested to learn if Kansas Academy of Family Physicians members are vaccinating patients, if patients are completing the entire series, and if the vaccine gives women a false reassurance regarding their protection, leading to skipping annual Pap smears.

The process for such an extensive research project was daunting. With more than 900 Kansas Academy of Family Physicians practitioners, the five students divided the list and called each provider two to three times. Intentions were good, but given physicians’ schedules and availability, only 172 of them completed the 10-minute phone survey, and 92 percent of their responses were estimates. Based on the surveys, 82 percent of physicians administer the HPV vaccine, and 91 percent said the HPV vaccine didn’t result in false reassurance.

With no numerical data from chart reviews, the research team couldn’t statistically say how many Kansas women received the vaccination and if they completed their three-dose treatments. Adding to the difficulty, it’s unknown if the vaccine gives false reassurance as girls in their early teenage years are vaccinated and often don’t have their first Pap smear for several years. Ninety-one percent of physicians interviewed do not believe the vaccine gives women false reassurance.

Since the HPV vaccine is not required like those for tetanus and hepatitis B, the research group was encouraged by the 82 percent of physicians surveyed who administer the vaccine. In addition to giving them hope that even more physicians will vaccinate in the future, they say the research experience was valuable as they embark on their residencies in Obstetrics & Gynecology, Family Medicine, Internal Medicine, and Pediatrics.

“It introduced us to how to write a research paper, conduct research, and analyze other papers that have been done so we can serve our patients better,” said Laura Platt, MD. “We learned more about evidence-based medicine and what works for the greater population. It’s more about helping us to analyze the literature and understand it because we’ve done it.”