Development of a pharmacist-driven community-based initiative to reduce cervical cancer rates in a small rural area: meeting the needs of an underserved population

Objectives:
Despite the availability of human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccines, the incidence of cervical cancer in our rural, medically underserved area remains strikingly higher than the national incidence. The HPV Awareness and Vaccination Project strives to meet the needs of this population by developing educational tools to supplement current resources offered by local health officials. The overarching goal of this multi-staged, inter-disciplinary project is to improve consumer knowledge about HPV-related disease and to increase vaccination rates.

Methods:
In 2009, student pharmacists under faculty supervision designed a survey for community leaders and healthcare providers to better understand perceptions of current clinical practice and behaviors of local patients/residents. Another survey was subsequently developed targeting males; it aimed at finding discrepancies in HPV knowledge.

Next, the project expanded community awareness of HPV-related cervical cancer and genital warts through various outlets such as radio and print media, face-to-face administration of surveys, continuing education opportunities for pharmacists and live presentations to undergraduate students. The progress of this initiative has been regularly reported to the medical community via poster presentations at state and national professional meetings.

Preliminary Results:
Our surveys have brought to light a clear lack of knowledge regarding HPV and cervical cancer. The project has since tailored its educational initiative to provide meaningful and relevant information to the public.

We can infer from our results that providing education will increase the vaccination rate, thus lowering the rate of HPV-associated cancer.

The next phase of the program will incorporate new media outlets, such as television public service announcements. The final phase will be administration of HPV vaccine by student pharmacists and Physician Assistant students in conjunction with the Local Health Unit (LHU). This collaboration will continue to strengthen as the research team works directly with our LHU to coordinate and implement the interdisciplinary HPV vaccination days.