

The HPV vaccine that doctors would recommend

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Despite the government's decision to choose the vaccine Cervarix for the UK human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination programme, every doctor I have spoken to has chosen Gardasil for their own children, says a doctor on bmj.com today.

Phil Hammond, a general practitioner and broadcaster, shares his consultant colleague's recommendation ("you'd be mad not to protect your daughter against genital warts if you can afford to") and the HPV vaccine choice he made for his children.

The genital warts lobby is largely undercover, he says, "but if it was breast cancer, there would doubtless be an industry supported march on Downing Street... There are no letters to the Times, and warts have never made it to the cover of the Mail."

Both vaccines are equally effective against the strains of HPV that are known to be responsible for seven in ten cases of cervical cancer, but only Gardasil protects against 90% of genital warts.

With 100 000 new cases of genital warts in England each year and condoms only reducing transmission by up to 50%, the far safer option is to vaccinate with Gardasil, argues Hammond.

But, although Gardasil is available privately to parents, at a cost of £350 to £400, most will not be able to afford it.

According to Hammond, with the current cost of treating genital warts estimated to be £23 million, the government's decision may be a false economy. Within three or four years the use of Gardasil would have begun to have a considerable financial payback.

The government's cheap deal for Cervarix only applies to the vaccination programme. The fact is that most doctors would recommend Gardasil because of the extra protection it offers, he writes.

In addition, he argues that there has been a glaring lack of patient choice. Having chosen one vaccine for us the government has failed to provide information on the other vaccine, which is given no mention on the NHS Choices website or on the NHS vaccination site.

He believes that for any licensed treatment, the public should be given quick and easy access to unbiased information on efficacy and safety.

Source: British Medical Journal

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