



Life Issues Forum

“Prevention or Promotion?”

by Theresa Notare

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A new vaccine is on the market to protect against two strains of viruses that cause 70% of the cases of cervical cancer. Sounds good? Yes and no.

The vaccination works *only* if given to a woman *before* she becomes sexually active. Because of this, some lawmakers in Michigan recently backed a bill to require girls entering the sixth grade to receive the vaccine. To assess whether this is reasonable we need some basic facts.

Cervical cancer is not a disease that a woman can catch through common contact. It is the result of sexual activity with an infected partner. The major cause of cervical cancer, the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), is really the name for a group of 100 viruses, some of which cause genital warts. About 20 million men and women are already infected with HPV, and about 6.2 million new cases of HPV occur each year. Although studies indicate that 80% of women who have multiple sexual partners before they marry will be infected with HPV by age 50, almost all of them (about 90% of those infected) will experience no ill effects. That is because the body can naturally clear itself of the virus.

Substituting the State for parents' authority to make medical decisions for their minor children is a serious matter. It should be based on firm evidence of a public health emergency. In this case, what is the evidence that all or most young girls will have multiple sexual partners before they marry, or marry only those who do? Is it simply that we can't imagine a world where sex is restricted to marriage? Should we assume that women will be protected from the effects of a promiscuous lifestyle if only they are inoculated ignoring broken hearts and damaged bonding abilities?

The truth is that we should not place too much trust in a vaccine that is not perfect. Remember, the new vaccination only protects against infection from two of the strains of HPV out of 100. So, while women's health advocates are celebrating the vaccine as "a breakthrough in cancer prevention," it is a limited breakthrough. This approach will provide false hope if it is used to keep alive the myth that sex with many partners can be made to produce no negative consequences. In the end, the HPV problem exists (along with many other serious problems)

because many people are having sex with many partners before they marry. The true public health breakthrough would be to admit that the human body just can't handle multiple sexual partners.

Educating people about the dangers of promiscuous sexual activity and promoting chastity would provide more than the illusion of "protection." A vaccine program should not be used to promote a false sense of security in promiscuity – it could actually worsen the problem if it leads many to believe that they are "protected" so "why not indulge?"

At \$350.00 per three-shot dosage, the chief beneficiaries of an HPV vaccination mandate are the pharmaceutical companies. A more complete and beneficial solution for women would be to alert men and women to the dangers of multiple sexual partners, the high incidence of STDs, and the benefits of chastity until marriage. That would be a plan worth promoting for the physical, emotional and spiritual health of the next generation.

Theresa Notare, MA, is the Assistant Director of the Diocesan Development Program for Natural Family Planning, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
3211 4th Street, N.E., Washington, DC 20017-1194 (202) 541-3070