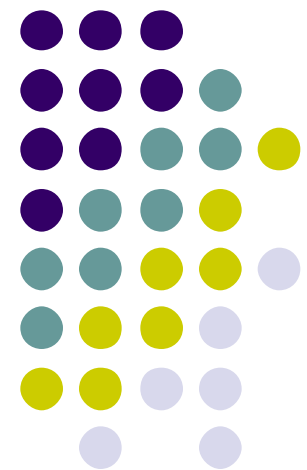


Countering the Rhetoric and Politics of the Religious Right on HPV

Reena Singh, MPA
Director of Advocacy
MergerWatch Project
APHA Annual Conference 2007





Outline

- Condoms, Conservatives and HPV
- Religious Extremists and HPV Vaccine
- School Mandates
 - Opposition Messages
 - Role of Religious Extremists
- Policy Recommendations
 - Where do we go from here?

Religious Conservatives, Condoms and HPV



- Rep. Tom Coburn and Condoms
 - 1999: House Breast & Cervical Cancer Treatment Act
 - Amendment – label to condom packages that they offer “little or no protection” against HPV
 - 2000-2001:
 - FDA reexamine condom labels
 - NIH panel on condom effectiveness
 - CDC website condom fact sheet removed/edited
 - 2004 - 2005:
 - House Committee holds hearings on cervical cancer, HPV, condom labeling
 - Coburn tries to hold Lester Crawford’s FDA nomination in exchange for “condom warning” labels. Kaiser Daily Women’s Health Report June 16, 2005

Boonstra, Heather. “Public Health Advocates Say Campaign to Disparage Condoms Threatens STD Prevention Efforts.” Guttmacher Institute. March 2003.

Religious Conservatives' Goals of Focusing on Condoms and HPV



- Manipulate science and research around HPV to disparage safety of condoms
- Promote fear based abstinence-only
- Destroy safe sex message
- Oppose prevention that isn't abstinence-only.

HPV Vaccine and Religious Conservatives



- Pre-FDA Approval
 - Initial reports that Family Research Council opposed the vaccine because it undermined the abstinence-only message.
 - “Giving the HPV vaccine to young women could be potentially harmful, because they may see it as a license to engage in premarital sex.” (*The New Scientist* 18 April 2005)
 - “...marketed to segment of population that should be getting abstinence. It sends the wrong message.” (*AlterNet* June 16, 2006)
 - Attempts to dispel the idea that the vaccine could be used as prevention.

HPV Vaccine and Religious Conservatives



- **Clarify position during ACIP hearing:**
 - Oppose state mandates and parental rights, support availability of vaccine.
- Family Research Council (re: mandatory vaccinations): “Because parents have an inherent right to be the primary educator and decision maker regarding their children's health, we would oppose any measures to legally require the vaccination or to coerce parents into authorizing it.”
- Focus on the Family (re: mandatory vaccinations): “...opposes mandatory HPV vaccinations for entry into public school. The decision of whether to vaccinate a minor against this or other sexually transmitted infections should remain with the child's parent or guardian.”

Religious Conservative Arguments against HPV State Mandates



- Arguments against mandates:
 - Parental rights
 - Efficacy
 - Promotes promiscuity
 - Undermines abstinence message
 - Opt out places “undue burden” on parents

Using Religion Against Science



- Religious conservatives used similar tactics to delay the FDA's approval of EC OTC.
- “Parental Rights” argument caused the FDA to only approve EC OTC for women over 18.
- Attempts to destroy EC as prevention message.



HPV Legislation in the States

- 41 states and DC have introduced legislation to require, fund or educate the public about the HPV Vaccine.
- 17 states have enacted measures that promote education or funding for HPV prevention/education.
- 24 states introduced mandates; VA and DC enacted the legislation.
- Texas Governor issued an executive order.

(National Conference of State Legislatures)

School Mandate Legislation



- **Pros**: Most effective way to ensure kids get vaccinated and help to ensure coverage for those who can't afford it.
- **Cons**: administrative roll-out still being evaluated; most vaccines are on the market for several years before becoming mandatory; provider capacity and vaccine supply still being determined; concerns about efficacy and safety.
- **Conservative argument against mandates** – parental rights and that “abstinence” should be a choice as a way to prevent HPV.

How do we talk about HPV?



- HPV Education:
 - Women's health groups supportive of increased education and access to health information.
- Funding for HPV Vaccine:
 - Most supportive of funding and access to vaccine for those who want it.
- State Mandates
 - Women's health advocates are also concerned about mandates:
 - Efficacy
 - Long term safety
 - Role of Merck in creating legislation
 - But, most remain supportive of funding and access to vaccine as a form of prevention.

Talking about School Mandates



- Need to balance our concerns without allowing religious conservatives to co-opt us into using “parental rights” since it could harm us on other issues.
- Balance concerns about mandates with access issues for those who want vaccine.

Where Do We Go From Here?



- Encourage access in terms of coverage, costs and in doctor's offices/clinics for those who want vaccine.
- Support access to a full range of medical care and comprehensive sexuality education for all.
- Continue to ask questions about the vaccine, the research, the role of drug companies.