Cognitive and Emotional Responses to Human Papillomavirus Test Results in Men

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI) in the United States, infecting over a half of all sexually active Americans at one point in their lifetime. HPV, best known to cause cervical cancer in women, can also cause other types of cancers, including vulvar, penile, anal, and head and neck cancers. While there have been many studies that have examined HPV knowledge, attitudes and behaviors among women, few studies have examined these issues among men.

As part of a larger natural history study of HPV in men, this study used surveys to examine the differences between HPV-positive and HPV-negative men in their HPV knowledge, emotional responses to test results, and changes in behavior and attitudes after testing.

Findings

Emotions

- Men who were HPV-positive tended to be older, more educated, and more likely to have been previously diagnosed with any other STI.
- HPV-positive men had lower belief in their ability (self-efficacy) to communicate to their partners about HPV or to perform prevention behaviors (e.g., XXX) than HPV-negative men.
- HPV-positive men reported more negative emotions such as anger, frustration, confusion, guilt, and depression after receiving their HPV test result compared to HPV-negative men.

Vaccination

- The majority of men (91%) reported that they would be very likely or likely to get the HPV vaccine if it were available to men.
- However, most men (70%) would want to know more about the vaccine's safety, efficacy, costs, and side effects before they got it.
- The most common barriers that men reported about getting the HPV vaccine was cost (66%) and side effects (63%).

Health Behaviors

- Only 13% of men reported that they used condoms more often since receiving their test results. HPV-positive men (18%) were much more likely to use condoms since learning their test results than HPV-negative men (10%).
- Men with a main sexual partner were more likely to tell their partner about their HPV test results (80%), than those with other sexual partners (68%).
- Among all men with a main sexual partner, only 23% urged their partners to get the HPV vaccine and 30% to get a pap-smear.

Men play a critical role in HPV transmission and are also affected by HPV-related diseases such as genital warts and cancer. However, approval for the HPV vaccine among men has only recently occurred. The findings of this study are important as it provides information related to men’s knowledge, attitudes and behaviors regarding HPV and the HPV vaccine. In addition, this study had a rare opportunity to look at differences between men who are HPV+ and HPV-. Future research should continue to capture men’s thoughts and experiences regarding HPV in order to help decrease the negative physical and psychosocial consequences related to an HPV among both sexes.

Citation