Tuesday December 15, 2015

Honourable Victor Boudreau
Minister of Health
HSBC Place
P.O. Box 5100
520 King St.
Fredericton, NB
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Dear Mr. Boudreau,

We have the tools to offer cancer prevention through means of vaccination. The human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccines are of the most significant cancer prevention breakthroughs, proving to be effective and safe for at least 10 years. Canada has proven to be a world leader in terms of providing vaccines very early to its female constituents. Now, federal, provincial, and territorial Canadian health ministers should show identical leadership in providing similar cancer prevention to its male constituents. A gender-neutral program aligns with the recommendation outlined in the January 2012 NACI statement for inclusion of boys in school-based programs. HPV Awareness is asking that the New Brunswick government consider budgeting for the inclusion of boys in the HPV vaccination program, because establishing a gender-neutral vaccination program now would be more efficient and cost-effective in the long run. From a timing perspective, like Manitoba and Quebec, it would be feasible for New Brunswick to start vaccinating males in Grade 7 starting in the fall of 2016. In addition, HPV Awareness also recommends establishing a catch-up program, similar to that offered to girls.

There are a couple of new important facts about the benefits of gender-neutral programs. First, new data is now coming in from Australia, where the HPV immunization program was expanded to include boys in 2013. There is strong proof that investing money in prevention will save health care costs down the road. In fact, when Australia observed declines in treatment costs associated with HPV diseases, they elected to take these savings and reinvest them to fund the expansion of their program to include boys. Such vaccination programs support health care budget sustainability through prevention of future costs. Here in Canada, Toronto researchers demonstrated that a gender neutral HPV vaccination program would save the healthcare system between $8 million and $28 million over the boys’ lifespan, varying according to the efficacy of the vaccine and how many boys receive the vaccine. Second, HPV-related throat cancers in men are currently on the rise. Unfortunately, many jurisdictions, where gender-neutral programs are not in place, are still demonstrating less than optimal vaccination uptake, reducing the impact of herd immunity. Also, heterosexual men could have partners coming from countries who do not have an HPV vaccination program in place for females.

We concur with the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada (SOGC) that says a gender-neutral program will help remove the sexual stigma, which has impeded the optimal success of the HPV vaccination programs. British Columbia has chosen to expand their program to include only “vulnerable”, “at-risk” males. While the program is being extended to more youth, we feel strongly that, for many scientific reasons, this decision will not have the expected impact and will instead leave many men and women unprotected against HPV. This sort of program requires men to self-identify as “at-risk” or gay in order to receive the vaccine. We agree with the BC Pediatric Society, that since we know that the HPV vaccine works best as a prevention method if given before exposure to HPV, boys would have to identify as being gay at a very young age and asking this of young boys is unrealistic. Moreover, many males will only identify as gay or bisexual in their 20s or even 30s. The BC Pediatric Society also points out that “at-risk males” often already face many obstacles without having to be singled out for a vaccination program. Our recommendation is that ALL boys be included regardless of sexual orientation.

All the boys of New Brunswick deserve protection against the heavy burden of HPV diseases and the same access to this vaccine as neighbouring provinces. Prince Edward Island expanded their HPV vaccination program in 2013 to include Grade 6 boys and Nova Scotia started the inclusion of Grade 7 boys this fall. Gordie Gosse, previous member of the Legislative Assembly, has an HPV-related cancer and has said, “I don’t want others to have to go through what I went through. By providing the HPV vaccine to boys the province can help prevent a lot of serious health problems for a future generation of men.”

We see firsthand and say clearly that the success of HPV prevention programs are contributed to a fine balance of financial support, education, and equity of vaccination programs against HPV. The HPV vaccination program must be financially supported so that the entire male population can have equitable access to vaccines against HPV, especially since no HPV screening exists for men currently.

Partnered with the SOGC and The Society of Gynecologic Oncology of Canada (SGOC), HPV Awareness is a national, bilingual, registered charity, the only one of its kind in Canada raising awareness of HPV, primarily through our programs. Since 2006, we have provided HPV education throughout our Canadian school systems to students of all ages, their parents, and faculty. There is a huge need for impartial, age-appropriate, simple and precise sexual health education in schools and homes. We work to educate providers, parents and young people, by improving adherence to existing programs.

Thank you for your time and attention to our recommendation.

Teresa Norris
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HPV Awareness

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Vice-President and Medical Advisor
HPV Awareness

cc: Dr. Elish Cleary, Chief Medical Officer of Health
cc: Ms. Shelley Lansburg, Director, Communicable Disease Control Branch
cc: Dr. Zeev Rosberger, member of HPV Awareness, Director, Psychology Division, Jewish General Hospital.
cc: Dr. Marc Steben, member of HPV Awareness, Medical Director, Clinique A.
cc: Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada (SOGC)
cc: Society of Gynecologic Oncology of Canada (SGOC)

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