Monday, January 30, 2017

Honorable Jim Reiter
Minister of Health
Room 204, Legislative Building,
2405 Legislative Drive, Regina, SK, Canada, S4S 0B3

Dear Mr. Reiter,

This month, Canadians read a column in the Saskatoon StarPhoenix written by Grade 9 students in the Collective Voice program in which they address the unfairness of the HPV vaccination program only being for girls. HPV Awareness equally agrees with these students and the points brought up in their letter. The fact that the HPV vaccination program is set-up like a lottery system where only the boys that are lucky enough to live in certain provinces get to benefit from protection against HPV-related cancers is unfair and unethical. To remedy this situation, a gender-neutral HPV vaccination program needs to be established.

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. HPV Awareness is asking that the Saskatchewan government consider budgeting for the inclusion of all 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. A gender-neutral program aligns with the recommendation outlined in the January 2012 NACI statement for inclusion of boys in school-based programs. From a timing perspective, like British Columbia, it would be feasible for Saskatchewan to start adding males in the current Grade 6 girls HPV vaccination program in the fall of 2017. A catch-up program could be implemented at the same time.

Important data has come out of Australia where the HPV immunization program was expanded to include boys in 2013. Australia currently has the best vaccination program. There is strong proof that investing money now 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. Furthermore, as brought up in the letter by the Grade 9 students, the Saskatchewan division of the Canadian Cancer Society has reported that at least 600 cases of HPV-associated cancers are expected to be diagnosed on the prairies this year alone. When you know that a single treatment of an HPV-related cancer costs more than $200,000, it is not hard to calculate the cost effectiveness of vaccinating everyone regardless of gender. 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.

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. All the boys of Saskatchewan deserve protection against the heavy burden of HPV diseases and the same access to this vaccine as neighbouring provinces. Manitoba expanded their HPV vaccination program in 2016 to include Grade 6 boys and Alberta started the inclusion of Grade 5 boys in 2014. We strongly encourage the inclusion of all males, regardless of their sexual orientation, in the vaccination programs, and we recommend that, when feasible, a catch-up program be implemented, similar to that offered to girls, as to optimize protection amongst all boys.

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. HPV vaccination programs 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 educational tools & programs. Since 2006, we have provided HPV information 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 HPV vaccination programs.

Thank you for your time and attention to our recommendation.

Teresa Norris
Founder and President
HPV Awareness

cc: Ms. Donna Ziegler, Director, Cancer Control at Canadian Cancer Society
cc: Dr. Zeev Rosberger, 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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