

Exploring Dental Practitioners' Confidence in Delivering HPV Vaccine Information

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Introduction

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI), it is estimated that 80% of sexually active adults will get HPV in their lifetime. Of the over 200 identified HPV types, 15 are classified as high-risk and strongly associated with multiple cancers, oropharyngeal being the one of most common HPV-related cancers.

Notably, oropharyngeal cancers linked to HPV surged by 225% between 1988 and 2004, making HPV the leading cause of oropharyngeal cancers in the US. Although initially developed for cervical cancer prevention, the HPV vaccine has emerged as a critical tool in reducing the burden of other HPV-associated cancers. This has led the ADA to recommend dentists to educate their patients about the HPV cancer prevention that the vaccine can provide.

Abstract

Objective: to gauge the confidence of dentists on their understanding and dissemination of HPV-related cancer prevention.

Methods: A five-question survey (“Quick Poll”) was distributed through the South Texas Oral Health Network (STOHN) Practice-Based Research Network (PBRN) to assess dental practitioners’ perspectives on HPV-related cancer prevention, with N=59 dental practitioners responding. The survey included two hypothetical case-based questions featuring Jordan, an eleven-year-old patient, and his parents, prompting respondents to consider their approach to discussing and recommending the HPV vaccine.

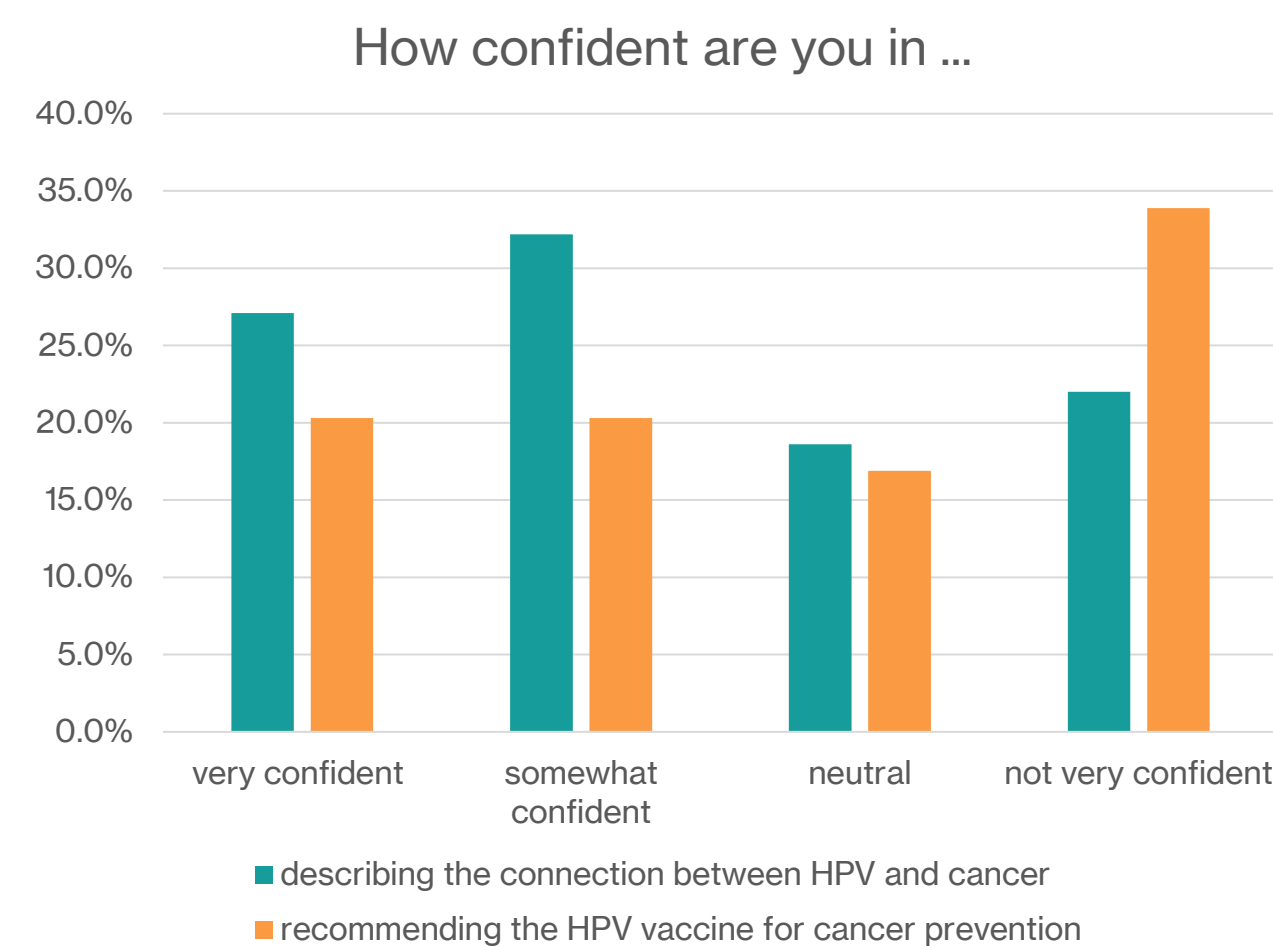
Results: Most practitioners felt confident in their ability to explain the connection between HPV and oropharyngeal cancer. However, when it came to actively recommending the HPV vaccine to a hypothetical patient, confidence levels were more divided, with practitioners showing nearly equal distribution between higher and lower confidence. While 40.6% of practitioners reported feeling confident in recommending the vaccine, only a small percentage (5.1%) did so frequently. Furthermore, 43.1% expressed interest in participating in a future study on this topic.

Conclusion: A majority of those who responded felt confident in their knowledge and ability to convey the connection between HPV and cancer, but most do not take active steps to recommend the vaccine to their patients.

Materials and Methods

A five-question survey ("Quick poll") was distributed through the South Texas Oral Health Network (STOHN) Practice-Based Research Network (PBRN)

A total of 59 dental practitioners participated in the survey which was conducted through Red Cap. Descriptive statistics were estimated.



Results

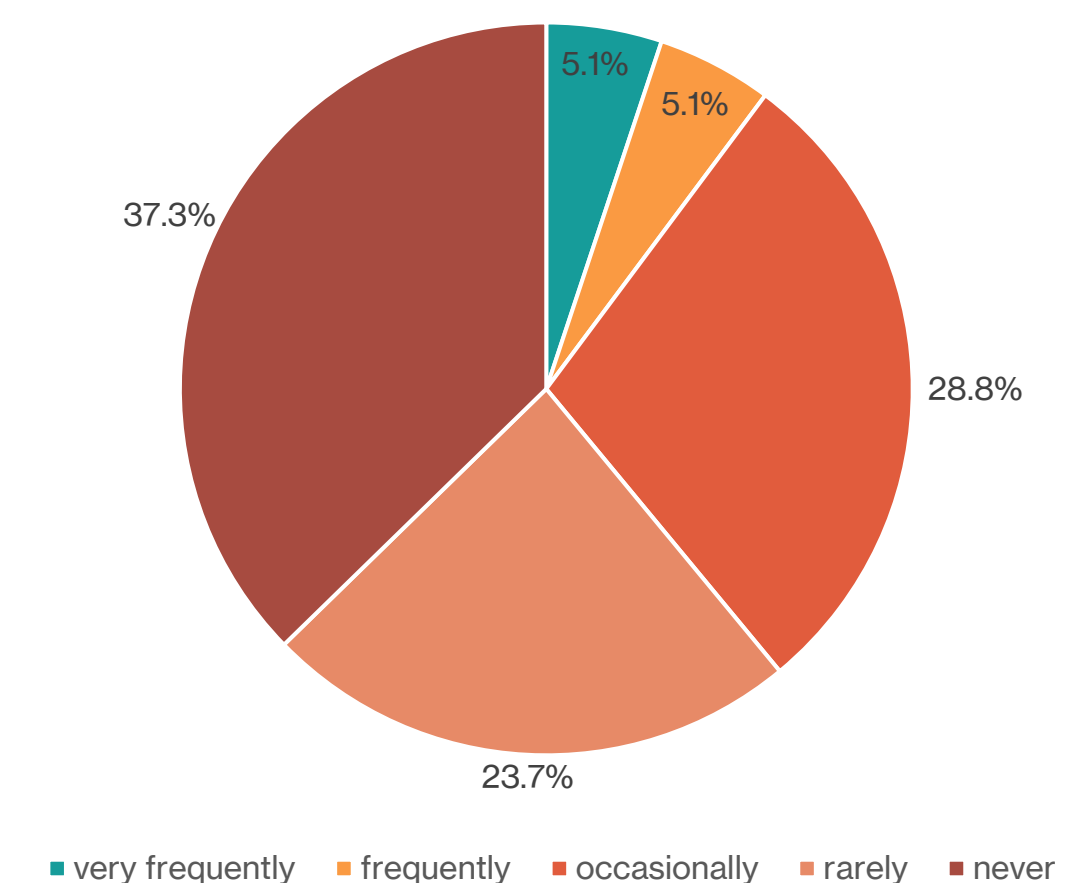
Out of the 59 dental practitioners, 59.3% felt "very confident" or "somewhat confident" in explaining the connection between HPV and oropharyngeal cancer to patients and parents; with none reporting being "not confident at all". However, when actively recommending the HPV vaccine to a hypothetical patient, confidence levels were similarly divided. 40.6% stating they felt “very confident” or “somewhat confident” and 42.4% felt “not very confident” or “not confident at all”.

Despite this, 37.3% of practitioners never recommend the HPV vaccine to eligible patients, and only 10.2% do so "frequently" or "very frequently." Practitioners identified several resources that could enhance HPV-related discussions in dental settings, including patient education materials (87.9%), communication training (44.8%), and example intake forms (36.2%). Additionally, 43.1% expressed interest in participating in a study on HPV vaccination, demonstrating a willingness to enhance their role in cancer prevention.

Conclusion

While most respondents feel confident in their knowledge and ability to explain the link between HPV and oropharyngeal cancer, far fewer reported being in comfortable recommending the HPV vaccine. This gap underscores the need for targeted interventions, such as patient education materials and communication training, to enhance dental practitioners’ role in HPV-related cancer prevention. Given the rising incidence of HPV-associated oropharyngeal cancers, integrating HPV discussions into dental visits represents a vital opportunity to advance public health.

How often do you recommend HPV vaccination to your patients who are age eligible?



References

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