

ASK AHSC

ANSWERS TO HEALTH QUESTIONS

From The University of Arizona Health Sciences Center (AHSC) in Tucson

Q Is there a new vaccine that can prevent cervical cancer?

A Researchers at the Arizona Cancer Center are hoping that a new vaccine will prevent cervical cancer by reducing infection with the human papillomavirus (HPV).

HPV infection contributes to the risk of cervical cancer. If we can control this sexually transmitted disease we believe that cervical cancer could be eliminated as a life-threatening disease worldwide.

HPV is the most common sexually transmitted disease in the U.S. and it infects about 1 million people per year. While HPV does not cause cervical cancer in all women infected, it is present in all women diagnosed with cervical cancer.

While cervical cancer incidence in the U.S. has declined over the past 10 years due to increased access to Pap smears, it continues to be the second most common cancer worldwide in women and the most common in developing countries.

More than 500,000 women worldwide will be diagnosed with cervical cancer this year and nearly 300,000 women will die from this disease. Eighty percent of cancer deaths from cervical cancer will be in developing countries such as Asia, Africa, Latin America and South America.

The three-year study will

involve healthy women, randomized to receive either the vaccine or a placebo. The Center is one of five sites nationally participating in this *clinical trial*.

The vaccine is being studied in healthy women, ages 18 to 23 years. Women interested in learning more about this study can contact a study coordinator at (520)514-6015, or by e-mail: HPV@azcc.arizona.edu.

—Anna Giuliano, Ph.D.,
director, Minority Cancer
Prevention Control, Arizona
Cancer Center, Tucson.

Q What help is available for mothers who have breast cancer and are having trouble discussing it with their children?

A Mothers who are told they have breast cancer often face overwhelming challenges. In addition to finding answers to questions about their health and managing their own uncertainty and fears, these women must help their children adjust to the diagnosis and changed family routines during treatments.

Often a diagnosis of breast cancer is like having an elephant in the room that no one wants to talk about in front of the children. But it is important to take into account how each family member is adjusting and coping with the cancer, including the children.

To help these mothers, the University of Arizona College of Nursing is conducting a study, "Enhancing Connections: Helping the Mother with Breast Cancer to Support Her School-Age Child." (The study is part of a \$3.7 million multi-site study by the National Cancer Institute.)

The Enhancing Connections program is targeted specifically to the cancer issues and to helping the mothers strengthen their parenting skills, enhance the quality of the mother-child relationship, increase the mothers' confidence in parenting their children and positively enhance the children's behavioral-emotional functioning.

This study will evaluate two programs, both designed to help mothers communicate with their children about the breast cancer. One program provides mothers with printed materials and a phone call from a specially trained patient educator to help the mothers use the printed materials. The other provides five in-home visits by a specially trained patient educator who is an expert nurse clinician to teach the skills at two-week intervals. Both programs offer mothers with breast cancer ways of helping the children express their feelings.

Mothers eligible to participate in the study are those diagnosed within the past eight months with Stage 0, I or II breast cancer, who have children between the ages of 8-12, are English-speaking, and are in a committed relationship. For more information, call the Enhancing Connections team at the UA College of Nursing, (520) 626-2992 or (520)626-2707.

—Joan Haase, Ph.D., R.N.,
associate professor, University
of Arizona College of Nursing,
Tucson.