

New Web Site Seeks to Up Adult Immunization Rates

BY ROBERT FINN

The National Foundation for Infectious Diseases has unveiled a Web site that takes a multipronged approach to increasing the rate of adult vaccination in the United States.

Revealed during a Webcast for reporters, www.adultvaccination.com provides information for patients, providers, and the news media, said Dr. Susan J. Rehm of the Cleveland Clinic, who is also medical director of the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases. Based in Bethesda, Md., the nonprofit foundation was established in 1973 and is dedicated to educating the public and health care professionals about the causes, treatment, and prevention of infectious diseases.

Adult immunization rates are far too low, Dr. Rehm said during the Webcast: "Most vaccination rates in adults are below 50%. The highest rates are for influenza and pneumococcal vaccines in people 65 and older, but even in these groups vaccination rates are below 70%."

Dr. Rehm attributed those higher rates to

'Our mission here is to focus the same type of concentrated efforts on all adult vaccines, to support increases in vaccination rates across the entire adult spectrum.'

Items in the Online Toolkit

- ▶ Appointment reminder cards
- ▶ "Office closed" message script
- ▶ "On hold" message script
- ▶ Patient fact sheet
- ▶ Patient Q&A
- ▶ Poster
- ▶ Tabletop tent cards
- ▶ Article for practice newsletter or physician's Web site
- ▶ Reminder postcards
- ▶ Resource list
- ▶ Sample standing orders

Source: www.adultvaccination.com

long-standing, comprehensive educational and awareness efforts aimed at the public and health care providers. "Our mission here is to focus the same type of concentrated efforts on all adult vaccines, to support increases in vaccination rates across the entire adult spectrum. While we're at it we'll also aim to increase the influenza and pneumococcal vaccination rates to new target levels," she said.

For patients, the Web site includes basic information on 13 vaccine-preventable diseases along with a short quiz that helps discern which vaccines they need. It also includes a simple fact sheet and the full schedule of adult immunizations recommended by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

For health care providers, the Web site includes a "Professional Practice Toolkit," with numerous resources. These include suggested text for reminder postcards, text to be added to the back of appointment reminder cards, and scripts for recorded telephone messages to be played when patients are on hold or when the office is closed. (See box below.)

Dr. Rehm has used a number of these resources in her own practice, and has implemented other strategies as well. "We have posters in our waiting room regarding various immunizations, and in each of the individual examination rooms we have posted the adult vaccination recommendations from the CDC. People can take a look at those and then it's also a stimulus for us to talk about them," she explained. "We have built in questions about vaccinations into our intake, so that when our assistants ask patients what medicines they're taking and they get their vital signs . . . they also update their vaccination immunization [records] and cue us to talk with patients about vaccines."

The Web site is supported by unrestricted educational grants to the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases from Glaxo-SmithKline, Merck, Sanofi Pasteur, and Wyeth Pharmaceuticals. ■

Varicella Vaccine May Spark CNS Disease, Study Finds

BY KERRI WACHTER

BALTIMORE — Despite the introduction of the varicella vaccine, central nervous system disease continues to be associated with varicella zoster virus and in rare cases can even result from reactivated vaccine strains, a study of 26 California cases shows.

Dr. Barbara Pahud and her colleagues identified 41 varicella zoster virus (VZV)-positive cases within the California Encephalitis Project (CEP), which runs standardized panels of diagnostic tests on specimens from cases of central nervous system (CNS) disease referred by physicians.

Dr. Pahud is a clinical fellow in pediatric infectious diseases at the University of California, San Francisco, and she presented the study findings in a poster at a conference on vaccine research sponsored by the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases.

Four real-time polymerase chain reaction protocols were used to target four vaccine-associated single-base polymorphisms, allowing the identification of VZV-positive specimens and discrimination of vaccine (vOka) from wild-type VZV strains. Cerebral spinal fluid samples were sent to the CDC for genotyping. Additional clinical information was requested for the 26 cases that were successfully genotyped. The median age of this cohort was 46 years; slightly more than half (53%) were white.

"This report includes the fourth documented case of VZV vaccine strain associated with CNS disease, presenting 11 years post immunization [with] meningitis and herpes zoster rash," the researchers wrote.

This strain was found in a previously healthy 12-year-old girl, who presented with meningitis symptoms. Notably, clinical presentation for this case did not differ from that

of wild-type varicella-associated CNS disease, "making the diagnosis of vaccine strain reactivation difficult based on clinical presentation alone."

VZV isolates can be divided into three genotypes: European, Japanese, and mosaic. In the United States, the predominant circulating genotype is the European one (82%).

The Oka vaccine strain belongs to the Japanese genotype. Sequencing data from the California cohort show that no one genotype predominates. In addition, the wild-type Japanese strains appear to be more common than has been previously reported.

Varicella-associated CNS reactivation occurs in both immunocompromised and immunocompetent individuals, who might or might not present with herpes zoster (HZ) rash. In this cohort "only 42% of cases presented with an HZ rash. Clinicians should maintain a high index of suspicion in diagnosing VZV in patients with CNS infection, since more often than not, it presents without the characteristic rash of primary varicella or HZ reactivation," the researchers noted.

Four out of the seven pediatric patients had no history of primary varicella disease. Varicella-associated CNS disease in these patients could be secondary to reactivation or caused by a first-time varicella rash, they wrote.

The live attenuated VZV vaccine was introduced in 1996. More than 50 million doses have been distributed in the United States since then. Current recommendations are two doses for children and other healthy people without evidence of immunity.

The study was funded through a subcontract with America's Health Insurance Plans under a contract from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. ■

White House Launches HIV/AIDS Awareness Campaign

BY HEIDI SPLETE

WASHINGTON — The Obama administration recently launched the first major U.S. initiative against HIV/AIDS in more than a decade.

The 5-year campaign, "Act Against Aids," is a joint effort of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the White House to educate the public about HIV/AIDS, which remains a se-

rious problem in the United States despite advances in treatment that allow more patients to survive.

Recent data from the Kaiser Family Foundation show that concern about HIV infection has declined in recent years, said Dr. Kevin Fenton, director of the CDC's National Center for HIV/AIDS.

"People don't recognize that they are at risk, and they engage in high-risk behavior," Dr. Fenton said at a press briefing.

The goal of the campaign is to educate the public about the risks of HIV and encourage them to get the right information to protect themselves and their communities.

The campaign kicks off with a series of public service announcements, including radio ads, online ads, and public transportation ads, with the theme, "Every 9.5 minutes."

According to data from the CDC, approximately 56,000 Americans become infected

with HIV each year, which translates to one person becoming infected about every 9.5 minutes.

The campaign also will target specific communities that are at increased risk for HIV, starting with the African American community, said Melody Barnes, who is assistant to the president and director of the White House Domestic Policy Council.

Targeted outreach is also planned for the gay, bisexual,

and Latino communities, she added.

Doctors need to know that the Act Against AIDS campaign will be working to raise awareness about HIV infection and encourage testing, Dr. Fenton said in an interview.

"This [effort] is likely to have an impact on health seeking behaviors," he said.

Consumer information regarding the HIV campaign can be found online at www.NineAndAHalfMinutes.org. ■