Reviewer's report

Title: Gaps in knowledge of the HPV vaccine among medical students suggest a need for improved public health information.

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Reviewer: Lyndal Trevena

Reviewer's report:

This paper surveys two cohorts of medical students in two consecutive years using a very brief questionnaire to measure awareness and knowledge of HPV. The first cohort was surveyed just prior to the governments' HPV catch-up campaign and the second cohort one year later. I have a number of specific comments as follows:

Abstract
• In the background section it should state which population the UK 2008 program involved. School girls? Young adults?
• Please include mean age of the first year medical students (Were they school-leavers or graduate-entry?)

Introduction
• Line 88 – please include information about where the catch-up program was administered.
• Lines 113-120 imply that low screening participation rates in young women are a problem. The NHS screening program does not include women under the age of 25 years because of the high false positive rate and low cancer rates. The authors state that Scotland has a different policy. Perhaps need to clarify at this point in the article that this study was conducted in Glasgow and highlight the relevant policy for these young women? I would remove the speculative comment about HPV vaccination causing lower screening. This issue is beyond the scope of the current study which aims to measure HPV knowledge.
• Line 126 – There has been MUCH published on HPV knowledge in recent years and the authors have not really cited many of the key studies on this topic. Can the authors clarify the relevance and importance of comparing HPV knowledge in young versus young women?
• The introduction really needs to make a stronger case for what is new and novel about this study.
Methods
• These are clearly explained

Results
• I will focus my comments on the results tables and these suggestions should then be reflected in the text if adopted
• I suggest combining Tables 1 and 2 and these tables need a denominator, the total population (n=?) after the title.
• Table 3 – Were the difference between cohorts calculated by gender? The introduction of this paper stated that one of the most important aims of this study was to compare knowledge between males and females but instead it is a comparison of pre and post the campaign....Please clarify what the aim of the study is and reflect in the analysis
• Table 4 could just be included in the text.
• Table 5 – please spell out PHI in the title.

Discussion and conclusions
• It’s difficult to draw too much from this selective group. However, the major discussion point here should be what ARE the most important messages for young women regarding HPV? The survey only asked four questions and two of these (questions 2 and 3) don’t really assess gist-based understanding of HPV’s causal relationship with cervical cancer and the vaccines role in preventing most but not all cervical cancer. Question 4 is purely opinion not knowledge.

Level of interest: An article of insufficient interest to warrant publication in a scientific/medical journal

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.