

Focus groups help identify barriers to HPV vaccination

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Louisiana has a much higher incidence of invasive cervical cancer than the national average, but a vaccine against the human papillomavirus (HPV) reduces the chances of getting cervical cancer by as much as 70 percent.



Doctors and students are working together to find out what keeps people from receiving the cancer-preventing vaccine in the New Orleans area. (Photo from HCA MediaWorks)

“Despite this fact, statistics show the vaccine is underutilized in our area, and we're not entirely sure why,” says Dr. William “Rusty” Robinson, chief of the section of gynecologic oncology at Tulane University School of Medicine.

[Dr. Amber Naresh](#), associate professor of obstetrics and gynecology at Tulane, and a team of undergraduate and medical students ? Emily Goodman, Chelsea Grimes, Meghan Klavans, Katherine Rogg and Lauren Slakey ? are organizing a series of

focus groups aimed at learning more about the barriers to HPV vaccination and how best to address them.

Participants have been recruited from the Tulane clinics across the area and Rouse's Supermarkets. Each focus group consists of two to six subjects, including mothers-to-be, young women who are not pregnant, and mothers of teenage children.

"The purpose of the focus groups is to get a general sense of the various reasons why people may not have gotten the vaccine," Naresh says.

"Once we have the data, we'll construct a longer survey that we'll be able to give to a much larger group ? about 1,000 people. The goal will be to identify a few discreet barriers to HPV vaccination that we might be able to address with some sort of public health intervention."

Naresh suspects that healthcare provider education will be important. "Many focus group recruits are telling us, 'I don't know what that is.' It's not that they're opposed to the vaccine, it's just that no one ever told them about it."

The focus groups are supported by the proceeds of last year's [No Evidence of Disease](#) band concert, says Robinson, a member of the band of six gynecologic oncologists.

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