Preface

A scientific response to prevent cervical cancer in the world

Cervical cancer remains a major public health priority. In at least one-third of the countries worldwide, cervical cancer is the most common cancer in women. In close to 60% of the countries, largely in less developed regions, cervical cancer dominates as the first or second cancer site. In contrast, in more developed regions, the majority of countries rank cervical cancer fifth or higher. However, among women below the age of 45 in up to 90% of all countries, including developed and less developed regions, cervical cancer remains one of the three leading cancers. The international and national economic and social disparities in cervical cancer prevention and treatment are staggering and strongly reflect the existing limitations for women, particularly those living in developing nations, to access or have availability to basic preventative measures for cervical cancer.

The current directions in basic and clinical research have expanded the possibilities of cervical cancer screening technology, human papillomavirus (HPV) testing and vaccinology. Novel concepts and technologies continue to be developed to enhance and make sustainable cervical cancer screening programs. First generation prophylactic vaccines designed to provide protection against several HPV-related disease outcomes have been successful in clinical trials and research directions for next generation vaccines are underway. Understanding what these tools are, how to use them and how to evaluate their impact is today a pressing social demand for the scientific, medical and public health communities. Because cervical cancer prevention encompasses a range of complex topics and public health disciplines globally, the need to clarify and present the information in the strictest and unbiased manner becomes a critical task.

1. WHO/ICO HPV Information Centre and the ICO Monograph Series on cervical (and other genital) cancer prevention

The plethora of novel information on new technologies for the control of cervical cancer needs to be conveyed to tens of thousands of professionals worldwide. To respond to this need, the Catalan Institute of Oncology (ICO) in close collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO)/ICO HPV and Cervical Cancer Information Centre, launched a series of international reviews in 2006 that are being published as scientific monographs and regional reports.

In August 2006, the first Monograph was published in both English and Spanish languages (Vaccine, Vol 24 Suppl. 3, 2006). In 2007, the group published an international compilation of HPV and cervical cancer statistics (Vaccine, Vol 25, Suppl. 3, 2007) and made it freely available in a user-friendly electronic format (www.who.int/hpvcentre). In 2008, this program is presenting a new three-volume monograph including an updated overview of the epidemiological achievements, technical developments and recent advances in the prevention of HPV-related diseases, accompanied by two region specific reports focused on the Latin America and Caribbean region and the Asia Pacific region. These regional reports will be available in English, Spanish, Chinese and Japanese languages and aim at summarizing the regional evidence needed to approach recommendations for cancer prevention in the regions. This work is based upon intense collaborations between local and international scientific communities.

The project is planning to coordinate two additional regional reports in the future that will describe the scientific advances in the field and review the current status of cervical cancer prevention and options for the Eastern European and African regions.

2. Authors and the review process

The preparation of the monograph series has implied the coordination of a well defined process involving more than 180 authors, over 150 reviewers and key experts in the field. For each of the monographs, at least one editorial preparation meeting has been held for the selection of authors, contents and timetable. Section editors and contributing authors for each supplement were selected based strictly on their research contributions and general expertise in the field to ensure the alignment of topics and coherence of information. The editorial procedures adapted to the guidelines issued by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors Uniform Requirements for Biomedical Journal submissions included an independent peer-review process. In addition, a final editorial and peer-review meeting was held with the editors and the first authors of each manuscript (Barcelona 2006 and Sitges, Barcelona 2008). At the meeting, the first authors presented the proposed manuscript among a round table of scientific peers for final discussions and feedback prior to submission to the journal.

In spite of the wider representation of institutions afforded by the authors, the published manuscripts are the scientific responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily bind or represent the institutions they serve. Likewise, no formal consensus was required in every instance, although significant majorities were usually reached and ample opportunities to express alternative views were allowed throughout the several months of monograph preparation.
As a general rule, only international publications in peer-review journals were eligible for referencing and quotation. Exceptions were allowed to include critical references to abstracts submitted and presented at major international meetings where regional data was found to be limited. In these cases, adequate details are provided in the relevant manuscripts.

3. Educational plan and tools

In order to maximize the impact of the publication, several initiatives are being developed. One is to facilitate access to the widest possible audiences, including scientific societies and major conferences. To this extent, the project plans to facilitate the liaison between conference secretariats, scientific and public health societies and individual scientists. Under the WHO HINARI international agreement, the publication series will also be available freely or at a low-cost on the internet for those countries included in the agreement.

The second initiative is to produce a web-based distance e-learning educational platform based on an existing program at ICO (www.e-oncologia.org), presenting the monograph contents and its updates in a guided and user-friendly format. The goal of this initiative is to facilitate and promote educational forums for small discussion groups in various languages. Group discussions are typically led by a scientific expert over a period of three to five weeks with access to a general library of questions and materials, as well as to a network of relevant authors and consultants. The platform is currently operating under a Spanish version; however translations into other languages will become available in the forthcoming months.

4. Prospects of cervical cancer control and eradication

In the years ahead, we should witness major efforts in the production, testing, and distribution of HPV vaccines to pre-adolescent, adolescent girls and young women. Considerable effort will also be devoted to the development of sustainable screening protocols in developed and developing countries. These new protocols will be critical to implement when HPV vaccinated cohorts reach screening age groups. They should also offer the best possible protection to the generations of women who will not receive the HPV vaccines and the adult women who are vaccinated with the current vaccines. In developing countries, mass vaccination of target age groups will be essential to achieve medium to long-term reduction of the burden of cervical cancer. Thus, major financial, cultural, logistical and political issues will have to be addressed and resolved. The purpose of this monograph series is to provide accurate, unbiased and comprehensive information to public health communities worldwide. It is a scientific response to a unique opportunity in the common pursuit of reducing the impact of cervical cancer globally. We sincerely hope the readers will recognize the effort and enjoy the work.

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