

AN Ounce OF PREVENTION

New vaccine keeps cervical cancer away

By Sally Silbermann

When it comes to cancer, medical breakthroughs for prevention and treatment are happening every day. Ten years ago, the concept of a vaccine to prevent cancer was a futuristic idea. Today, that idea has become a reality.

At Memorial Health University Physicians—Provident Ob-Gyn Associates in Savannah, patients are taking advantage of the latest advancement in cancer prevention by getting vaccinated against cervical cancer. Gardasil®, a vaccine developed by Merck pharmaceutical company, helps protect women against diseases caused by human papillomavirus (HPV).

What Is HPV?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, HPV affected about 20 million people in the United

States in 2005. It is spread through genital contact and often does not present any symptoms. There are many types of HPV, and most are harmless and go away by themselves. While HPV can affect both men and women, women are at higher risk for one of the most serious effects of HPV, cervical cancer. Last year, the vaccine Gardasil was approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for prevention of cervical cancer.

“There are a lot of subtypes of HPV, and this vaccine doesn’t prevent them all,” says Kimberly Crute, M.D., obstetrician-gynecologist at Memorial Health University Physicians—Provident Ob-Gyn Associates. “However, it prevents 70 percent of cervical cancers and 50 percent of genital warts. Essentially, this is our only preventive measure for those two diseases.”

The Vaccine

Gardasil is targeted toward women ages 9 through 26, although some insurance companies will pay for the vaccine for women over 26. A

Pap test is not required for younger women to receive the vaccine, but Crute reiterates the importance of Pap tests for women who are sexually active.

“Pap tests are recommended one year after a woman becomes sexually active or at age 21, whichever comes first,” she says. “An annual Pap test is very important.”

The vaccine is given in a series of three injections over a period of six months and doesn’t produce any serious side effects. And woman already infected with HPV can still get the vaccine, Crute says.

“It may prevent reinfection of a new strain,” she says.

Many of Crute’s patients are now requesting the vaccine, and she is happy to oblige them. To find out if the vaccine is right for you and the young women in your family, talk to your gynecologist and your child’s pediatrician. ■

Cancer Facts

To learn more, visit memorialhealth.com and do a “site search” for cervical cancer or HPV.



Kimberly Crute, M.D.

The Doctor Is In

Kimberly Crute, M.D., is board certified in obstetrics and gynecology and specializes in adolescent gynecology and laparoscopic surgery. She completed her residency at Carolinas Medical Center in Charlotte, N.C. Crute is a fellow of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. She has special interests in adolescent gynecology, minimally invasive surgery and menopause management. For more information, visit providentobgyn.memorialhealth.com.