



MEDIA RELEASE
22 August 2008

Is Taxpayer Victim of Aggressive Marketing for Gardasil?

Family First NZ says that the government's commitment to spend \$160m over four years on the Gardasil vaccine for cervical cancer may have been as a result of aggressive marketing by the drug company without adequate research.

Two articles in this week's *New England Journal of Medicine* suggest that the vaccines against cervical cancer are being widely used without sufficient evidence as to their cost benefit, and their effectiveness in tackling the disease.

"Despite great expectations and promising results of clinical trials, we still lack sufficient evidence of an effective vaccine against cervical cancer. With so many essential questions still unanswered, there is good reason to be cautious," wrote Dr. Charlotte J. Haug, editor of *The Journal of the Norwegian Medical Association*.

According to a report in the *New York Times*, Dr. Haug points out the vaccines have been studied for a relatively short period — both were licensed in 2006 and have been studied in clinical trials for at most six and a half years. Researchers have not yet demonstrated how long the immunity will last, or whether eliminating some strains of cancer-causing virus will decrease the body's natural immunity to other strains. And because cervical cancer develops only after years of chronic infection with HPV, Dr. Haug said there was not yet absolute proof that protection against these two strains of the virus would ultimately reduce rates of cervical cancer — although in theory it should do so.

And a study by Jane J Kim and Dr Sue Goldie of Harvard concluded that it might make more economic sense to rely on Pap smear screening alone which has effectively reduced cervical cancer death rates to very low levels.

"By spending \$160m on this vaccine, there is less money available for other health issues including drugs like herceptin and heart disease medication," says Bob McCoskrie, National Director of Family First NZ.

"It seems that the government has been a victim of aggressive marketing worldwide by the vaccine makers with many questions regarding its effectiveness still unanswered – including its duration of protection, potential side-effects, and its cost effectiveness. Regular pap smears are still necessary and have been proved to be most effective in the fight against cervical cancer."

"The taxpayer has just invested a huge amount of money in what can only be termed an ongoing experiment, while other drug needs are left wanting. Taxpayers and sick New Zealanders deserve better," says Mr McCoskrie.

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