

TRAVEL REPORT (NFOG reference no: NF13029)

Prevention of Cervical cancer and Human Papilloma Virus in the Pacific Region

Cervical cancer is the second most common type of cancer in women in low-income countries. Infection with the sexually transmitted Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) is a direct cause of these cancers. Globally there are 529.000 new cases per year 85% of which occur in low-income countries, representing more than any other cancer the inequities that exist in health. Annually 275.000 women die of cervical cancer, which is as high a death toll as for that of maternal deaths. The Pacific Region carries a high burden of cervical cancer with age standardized incidence and mortality rates ranging 9,4-50,7/100.000 per year and 3,4-23,9/100.000 per year which translates into approximately 800 new cases of cervical cancer and 500 preventable deaths per year (1-3). Particularly the Melanesian Island states have incidence and mortality rates that rank among the highest in the world (4, 5).

This project was carried out in collaboration with the international organization Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) which aims to support sustainable development for Pacific island states and territories. The aim of the project was to map the current burden of cervical cancer in the Pacific region as well as current prevention activities across the 21 island states as a means to generate information for future regional strengthening of cervical cancer prevention in the Pacific.

In Dec-Jan 2013/14 in collaboration with the SPC public health department we carried out a systematic literature review as well as a cross-sectional survey of 21 island states and territories in the Pacific. We interviewed reproductive health focal points within Ministries of Health on current screening and vaccine practices in their country of origin as well as barriers to introduce and/or maintain HPV vaccination.

The results of the survey is expected to be published in a peer-reviewed journal. Additionally a policy note has been prepared. The policy note will be presented at the Heads of Health meeting for Pacific Ministries of Health in late April 2014. Prior to this meeting the policy note will be discussed among other partners involved in cervical cancer prevention in the region (WHO, UNFPA and UNICEF) and hopefully endorsed as a means to build consensus among development partners and strengthen the coordination of support for cervical cancer prevention in the Pacific region.

13th of January 2014, Josephine Obel

References:

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