

# "IT MAY NOT BE A BAD IDEA TO POKE YOUR PATIENT WITH A VACCINATION NEEDLE!"

Low Sher Guan Luke and Low Lian Leng

SFP2018; 44(2): 3

It was not uncommon for mothers to tell their young children to go near other children who have chickenpox, so that their children will come down with that dreaded disease, recover from it, and then develop immunity to it for the rest of my life. With the advent of vaccines, there are more elegant ways to develop immunity towards a disease without being taken ill. Varicella vaccination is one good example and vaccine preventable diseases such as influenza and pneumococcal remain key to avoid influenza epidemics and unnecessary mortality from invasive pneumococcal disease. The morbidity and mortality resulting from infections have drastically reduced, and family physicians in Primary Care are at the frontlines to advocate the necessary vaccinations for the patients and the family unit.

In unit 1, Dr Loh Jia Shen and Dr Wong Sin Yew wrote extensively on vaccination in the elderly, and how vaccines can protect against influenza, pneumococcus and varicella-zoster infections in this vulnerable group. Vaccinations had become one of the cornerstones in preventing these infectious diseases in the elderly. However, even though such vaccines are available, administration and implementation strategies still remain a challenge in many parts of the world. Both authors also touched on new vaccines created either via novel immunogens, route of administration, vehicle of delivery, methods of manufacture in the continuous pursuit of invigorating medical science and delivering better outcomes for the patients.

In unit 2, Prof Paul Anantharajah Tambyah and A/Prof Goh Lee Gan reviewed extensively the current literature on pneumococcal vaccination – effectiveness, cost-effectiveness studies and recommendations in the local and international vaccination schedules. However, the update of pneumococcal vaccination remained low, and emphasized improving the knowledge and attitudes of patients towards pneumococcal vaccinations for a vaccine preventable disease.

In unit 3, A/Prof Helen Oh addressed the issue of how travelers or dwellers in some parts of the world at risk, can be protected against Japanese encephalitis, yellow fever, salmonella typhi and meningococcus infections. A/Prof Oh's review covered existing limitations of these vaccinations and made relevant recommendations on the use of the above vaccinations. Her article will help many travel medicine providers to put forward the appropriate recommendations to travelers who approach them for advice.

In Unit 4, Dr Leong Choon Kit discussed about the barriers to vaccinations such as cost, side effects, myths, lack of an IT reminder system, just to name a few. Dr Leong also proposed solutions at the policy, system, research and business levels to improve vaccine uptakes. His article will resonate with many practicing private family physicians and preamble to what could be an engaging discussion for question and answer.

Unit 5 by Dr Leong Hoe Nam gave an overview of Dengue vaccination, a topic of much media attention in late 2017 with the Ministry of Health advisory not to vaccinate patients who have not been previously infected by dengue. While the vaccine is effective in reducing incidence of severe disease and hospital admissions in seropositive individuals, vaccination increases the risk of severe dengue and hospitalization in seronegative individuals.

Unit 6 by A/Prof Goh Lee Gan is a review on medical ethics in the context of vaccinations, covering the following key areas: (i) Framework of medical ethics and vaccinations; (ii) Moral right to nonmedical vaccine exemption; (iii) Vaccine hesitancy and trust; (iv) Parental vaccine refusal; (v) Vaccination ethics in public health emergencies: rationing, restriction, and responsibilities. These are challenges in everyday primary care practice, and Prof Goh's review makes for an essential read.

The selected ten readings by A/Prof Goh Lee Gan included articles on important topics: Uptake of pneumococcal vaccination among older adults living in the community in Singapore; Using research to guide and formulate educational interventions to improve knowledge and attitudes towards vaccination; influenza and meningococcal vaccinations including among travelers; Immunogenecity and safety of Hepatitis B vaccination in diabetics; Knowledge, attitudes and practices of young women towards Human Papillomavirus vaccination; and Prevalence of diphtheria and tetanus antibodies among adults in Singapore.

For this issue of the SFP, we have two original articles by Dr Teo Boon See and Dr Charity Low and their co-authors.

Singapore is waging a war against diabetes for quite some time. With multiple campaigns on this war, public awareness on diabetes and its complications had certainly increased. Is it possible for primary care clinics to increase such awareness further by giving out flyers? Dr Teo Boon See conducted such a study to evaluate the hypothesis that giving out leaflets about diabetes screening at registration will increase diabetes screening uptake. The study found that giving such leaflets on diabetes to patients at registration did not significantly increase uptake of diabetes screening. The study recognized that barriers to screening, different stages of behavior, costs of screening and the content and method of delivering the educational materials play a part in achieving higher screening rates for diabetes.

Depression is prevalent in many parts of the world, including Singapore. It may be a challenge to screen for depression in busy primary care clinics. Dr Charity Low's team examined the psychometric properties of the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) in her clinic, evaluating the performance of 1- and 2-item versions of the PHQ compared to the full PHQ-9. The study found that PHQ-2 performed well and remains a viable tool for busy family physicians to decide if PHQ-9 should be further administered.