ABSTRACT

VACCINATION PRACTICES AND BELIEFS AMONG DENTAL HYGIENISTS

Objective: The purpose of this study was to ascertain vaccination beliefs and practices of Dental Hygienists. Guiding research questions included: 1) What was their awareness of Centers for Disease Control (CDC) vaccination guidelines for healthcare workers 2) What vaccinations were the participants most/least likely to obtain and their objections to vaccinations and 3) Did participants consider vaccinations to be an ethical obligation.

Background and Problem Statement: There is a large body of evidence supporting the safety and efficacy of vaccinations; however, there remains a number of reasons why individuals, including healthcare workers, might oppose vaccination, including opposition based on religious, philosophical and safety rationale. (Dowst-May, 2015). We expect to find that approximately half of practicing Dental Hygienists adhere to CDC guidelines for the recommended vaccinations.

Methodology: We utilized a survey research design for this study. Dental Hygienists, who are members of their professional organization, were invited to participate in a web-based survey designed to obtain information about their vaccination beliefs and practices. Fifty-five Dental Hygienists responded. Permission was obtained from UDHA to use the email list for research purposes. Information in the email asked the participants to review the consent to participate and were then referred to a link containing the survey. All participants’ answers were anonymous. Responses to the survey were presented using frequencies, percentages and range as appropriate.

Results: Most of the respondents (56%) were practicing five years or less and were 20-25 years of age. Just over half of the subjects were aware of and reported they adhere to the CDC recommended vaccinations. Approximately half of the subject’s place of employment requires vaccinations. Approximately 64% of Dental Hygienists reported they received the flu vaccine with most of their employers either recommending or requiring this vaccine. While the majority of participants indicated they had health insurance that paid for vaccinations (94%), a significant number did not receive the flu vaccine (36%). For those not receiving this vaccine, “no time/interest in getting the vaccine” and “I don’t think the vaccine works” were the most frequently cited reasons for not getting the vaccine, (44% and 39%, respectively). A large majority, 82%, indicated vaccinations an ethical obligation for a practicing Dental Hygienist.

Conclusion: While having a moderately high awareness of CDC guidelines and financial support from health insurance for vaccinations, it was surprising that vaccination compliance, for the flu vaccine, was not even higher among the respondents to this survey. Future research should further explore the reasons given for not getting the flu vaccine.

Key Words: Vaccinations, Dental Hygienists