

Australian Populations' Knowledge and attitude towards HPV Infection

Authors:

Rumianek B¹, Siedlecka E¹, Sawleshwarkar S¹, Ajwani S^{1,2}

¹The University of Sydney, ²Sydney Dental Hospital and Oral Health Services, SLHD, University of Sydney

Background:

As the incidence of oropharyngeal squamous cell carcinoma (OPSCC) increases, knowledge of the Australian population about HPV infection and sexual behaviour as risk factors and attitudes to discussing relevant sexual health topics and oral HPV infection with treating dental practitioners play an important role in the screening and diagnosis.

Methods:

This cross-sectional quantitative study was conducted between 2020-2021. Adult members of the Australian population were invited to complete an online survey distributed through Facebook. Data were evaluated using SPSS, frequency and X² for bivariate analysis. A p-value $\leq .05$ was considered significant.

Results:

In total, 273 participants responded; 181 (66.3%) were female, and 117 (42.9%) were born in Australia. While the majority identified HPV correctly, 46 (16.8%) were unsure what it was, and those aged 20-29 (M = 6.60, s.d. = 1.84) identified fewer correct responses than older participants. Those aged 30-39 were more likely to expect their dentists to check everything possible (84.0%, n = 50), and 11.4% (n = 31) thought dentists should only examine and treat their teeth. The majority, 169 (61.9%), felt HPV testing should be available in dental clinics. Of those, 58 (21.2%) thought so due to convenience, 22 (8.1%) due to visiting the dentist more than their doctor, and 162 (59.3%) thought it made sense. Sixty-three participants (23.1%) felt very much comfortable discussing sexual health issues with the dental staff, 25.6% (n = 70) were somewhat comfortable, and 5.9% (n = 16) felt very much uncomfortable.

Conclusions:

The increasing incidence of OPSCC warrants more efforts to improve the population's awareness of oral HPV infection and sexual behaviour as risk factors. Dental practitioners are ideally placed to provide initial screening for oral HPV infection and to discuss sexual behaviour and other risk factors associated with OPSCC.