

LIFE-COURSE IMMUNIZATION – VACCINATE FOR LIFE SERIES

Dr. Low Lian Leng, Dr. Xu Bang Yu

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The upcoming Family Practice Skills Course on Life-course immunization – Vaccinate for Life series will touch on common vaccines that family physicians (FP) must be familiar with. In last year's Family Practice Skills Course on Vaccinations in Adults, an extensive overview of vaccinations in the elderly, pneumococcal vaccine, travelers' vaccines and medical ethics in the context of vaccination were discussed by experts. Indeed, vaccinations are elegant ways of developing immunity to dreaded infectious diseases without being taken ill. The morbidity and mortality resulting from infections have drastically reduced, and FPs in Primary Care are at the frontlines to advocate the necessary vaccinations for the patients and the family unit. They must be well acquainted with the advances and latest guidelines in vaccines. Vaccine preventable diseases such as influenza and pneumococcal remain key to avoid influenza epidemics and unnecessary mortality from invasive pneumococcal disease. Currently there is an alarming Measles outbreak worldwide. In the United States, with 764 individual cases of measles been confirmed in 23 states from 1st January to 3rd May 2019. This is the greatest number of cases reported in the United States since 1994 and measles was declared eliminated in 2000¹. In Japan, 161 cases of measles were diagnosed from 1st January to 20th May 2018². As of 4th August 2018, over 5000 cases of measles were reported in Brazil, of which more than 1000 were confirmed³. Centre for Disease Control (CDC) recommends that children get two doses of MMR vaccine and teens and adults should also be up to date on Measles, Mumps, Rubella (MMR) vaccinations. Ministry of Health (MOH) Singapore recommends two doses of MMR vaccine for adults without evidence of immunity and/or prior disease⁴.

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In unit 1, Dr Leong Choon Kit presents the HALO (Health, Age, Lifestyle and Occupation) approach introduced by the CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) to help physicians customize vaccinations for the public with the circumstances and needs of the public in mind. With the HALO approach, the public is able to discuss with their personal FP and receive the relevant vaccines to prevent diseases and maintain health. The HALO strategy and tool offers the busy FP an easy to use way to customize the myriads of vaccines available to the individual patients according to their health conditions, age, lifestyle and occupation.

In unit 2, A/Prof Hsu Li Yang discussed on the clinical aspects of influenza and its treatment, and most importantly the prevention of influenza. At the population level, annual influenza vaccination remains the most cost-effective intervention to reduce the burden of influenza. World Health Organisation (WHO) organizes biannual influenza vaccine

composition meetings for northern and southern hemispheres (Singapore is classified by WHO as being in the “northern hemisphere” for the purposes of influenza vaccination) in order to attempt to predict the correct seed viruses based on the genetic and antigenic characteristics of circulating viruses detected by the WHO Global Influenza Surveillance and Response System. Special consideration for influenza vaccination should be given to population subsets deemed at higher risk for developing complications following influenza infection.

In unit 3, Dr Brenda Ang provided an overview of the clinical presentation, diagnosis and treatment of Bordetella pertussis. Pertussis remains a highly contagious disease with significant morbidity, and even mortality in extreme of age groups. Dr Brenda Ang makes a case for extending pertussis vaccine to the elderly and those with risk factors for severe disease. In fact, health care workers (HCWs) are a priority group for vaccination because of their increased risk of acquiring infection and the potential to transmit pertussis to high-risk patients, such as children and infants, as well as to the elderly. Recognizing this, in September 2018, MOH has updated recommendations for DTP to all HCWs, and not only for those managing children.

The selected ten readings by A/Prof Goh Lee Gan included articles on important topics: Vaccinations in patients with COPD and bronchiectasis; and Influenza vaccination in older adults. The readings also highlight the important role of maternal life course vaccinations and the crucial role that maternal care providers can play as vaccinators for pregnant women.

For this issue of the SFP, we have one original PRISM article by Dr Fok Wai Yee Rose, Dr Low Sher Guan Luke and Dr Farhad Fakhruddin Vasanwala. Through a case study on an elderly lady with advanced dementia, recurrent catheter-associated urinary tract infection and sacral pressure injury, the authors shared how the multi-disciplinary Hospital to Home program coordinated the care for such a complex patient that included medical, nursing care, financial assistance and home equipment. Importantly, the authors discussed the value proposition of the family physician in leading such multi-disciplinary home care teams and how this has resulted in a more seamless transition of complex patients from hospital to care anchored in the community.

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