

Transcript Details

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Exploring the Under-Recognized Benefits of Flu Vaccination

Announcer:

You're listening to *Clinicians Roundtable* on ReachMD, and this episode is sponsored by CSL Seqirus. Here's your host, Dr. Jennifer Caudle.

Dr. Caudle:

Welcome to *Clinicians Roundtable* on ReachMD. I'm your host Dr. Jennifer Caudle, and joining me to highlight the underrecognized benefits of influenza vaccination for older adults is Dr. Carolyn Bridges, Director of Adult Immunizations at Immunized.org. Dr. Bridges, thank you so much for being here today.

Dr. Bridges:

Thanks so much for having me.

Dr. Caudle:

Of course. So let's dive right in. Can you tell us about the benefits of the flu vaccine for older adults with heart disease?

Dr. Bridges:

Yeah, that's a great question. We know that the incidence of heart disease goes up with age. And we also know that in the week or two after someone has had an influenza infection, they have an increased risk of having major cardiac events. Also, multiple studies have shown that having had influenza vaccination decreases the risk of major cardiac events like stroke and heart attack, particularly among patients who have known cardiovascular disease. So it's very important for everyone, of course, 6 months and older to get their influenza vaccine, but particularly for older adults and adults of any age with existing cardiovascular disease.

Dr. Caudle:

It's very important, and important that we know this. If we take a look at another patient population, how does the flu vaccine help protect those with comorbidities such as lung disease and diabetes?

Dr. Bridges:

Right. Absolutely. We know that having diabetes and having chronic lung disease like COPD are risk factors for severe outcomes from influenza. And in those populations, influenza vaccination has been shown again to decrease the risk of severe disease, including hospitalization.

Dr. Caudle:

Excellent. Now if we switch gears and focus on the cost-effective benefits, what impact does vaccination have on the financial burden older adults often face?

Dr. Bridges:

Well, I would not just narrow this to older adults, but also all adults. Right? We know that influenza increases your risk of being away from work, increases your risk of needing outpatient medical care, as well as hospitalizations. It also increases the number of people who have antibiotic needs or antibiotics prescribed if you get influenza. And vaccination reduces all those risks. It decreases the number of days lost from work, it decreases outpatient visits, antibiotic use, and hospitalization. And for older adults in particular, it decreases

the risk also of influenza-related deaths. So there are substantial benefits both from the patient's perspective as well as economic perspectives.

Dr. Caudle:

Excellent. And as a quick follow-up to that, how do flu vaccines help decrease the financial burden on the healthcare system?

Dr. Bridges:

Well, certainly by decreasing lost workdays and healthcare workers being out of work sick. That's a significant benefit of flu vaccination in the workplace. And of course, then decreasing those significant costs for hospitalization and death. In multiple studies, influenza vaccinations have been shown to be very cost effective.

Dr. Caudle:

Excellent. For those of you who are just tuning in, you're listening to *Clinicians Roundtable* on ReachMD. I'm your host Dr. Jennifer Caudle, and I'm speaking with Dr. Carolyn Bridges about the underrecognized benefits of the flu vaccine for older adults.

Dr. Caudle:

So Dr. Bridges, given everything we've discussed, what communication strategies can we use to help educate patients on these underrecognized benefits?

Dr. Bridges:

Yeah, thank you. Great question. First of all, we know that the provider's recommendation for influenza vaccine as well as other vaccines is really key. Patients rely on the good advice of their trusted medical providers to help them make important decisions like vaccine decisions. So taking the opportunity to make sure and remind patients in person when they're seen, as well as through other means, like through email or text reminders. Those really can help improve vaccination rates.

For patients who might be more vaccine hesitant, remember that sometimes it takes more than one conversation with the patient. We want to make sure we listen with empathy, answer all of their questions as well as we can, and give them multiple opportunities to get vaccinated if at the first visit they are not yet receptive to getting influenza vaccination. Also, patients really appreciate tailored messages. Why me? What are the benefits specifically based on my age, my living situation, and my health conditions? Raising those issues can also be very helpful in tailoring that message for your specific patients.

Also, we know we have not had much influenza over the last couple of years, mostly probably due to the COVID-related mitigation efforts. And so I think just acknowledging that for patients but letting them know really that flu vaccination is their best insurance to make sure that they are protected from severe influenza, no matter what the season brings, which is really always unpredictable.

And lastly, I would really emphasize the importance of vaccination of the whole family. We want to decrease influenza exposure as well for older adults, particularly those who may not have the most robust immune system or immune response to vaccination. So it's very important not only to vaccinate those older adults, but make sure that everyone around them is also vaccinated.

Dr. Caudle:

That's excellent. And before we close, Dr. Bridges, are there any additional key points that you'd like our audience to take with them?

Dr. Bridges:

I think just to, again, reiterate to patients that influenza is quite variable, not only in terms of the severity of the influenza season, but it can be as well with vaccine effectiveness. And sometimes that is a question that patients will have. Regardless, the vaccine provides substantial benefit, even in years often where we don't have as high of effectiveness as we would like to see. But it is very important to continue to get vaccinated. And also I would continue to emphasize the safety of influenza vaccination for patients.

Dr. Caudle:

Excellent. Those are certainly some great points to keep in mind as we come to the end of today's program. And with that, I'd really like to thank my guest, Dr. Carolyn Bridges, for joining me to share some surprising ways and important ways older adults can benefit from the flu vaccine. Dr. Bridges, it was great having you on the program.

Dr. Bridges:

Thanks so much for having me.

Announcer:

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