

Transcript Details

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Strategies for Integrating Flu Vaccination into Routine Patient Care

Announcer:

You're listening to *VacciNation* on ReachMD, and this episode is sponsored by CSL Seqirus. Here's your host, Dr. Charles Turck.

Dr. Turck:

This is *VacciNation* on ReachMD, and I'm Dr. Charles Turck. Joining me to discuss how we can integrate flu vaccination into routine patient care is Dr. Laila Woc-Colburn. She's an Associate Professor at the Emory University School of Medicine and an attending physician on the Infectious Diseases Consultation Service at Emory University Hospital in Atlanta. Dr. Woc-Colburn, welcome to the program.

Dr. Woc-Colburn:

Thank you for having me, Dr. Turck.

Dr. Turck:

Now to start us off, Dr. Woc-Colburn, would you tell us about what sort of disease burden the flu poses?

Dr. Woc-Colburn:

Yeah, so flu in general is one of our annual respiratory viruses that we see. We usually see it through the time of fall and winter. Interestingly enough, the CDC reports what the prevalence is and what we're seeing. The other marker that we see is we look at the global South—parts of South America and Australia—to see what the burden of influenza is going to be this year. And knowing that they already started their vaccinations and seeing their cases, we had seen a bit of an increase in severe influenza; those are the cases that end up in the hospital and in intensive care units. So that kind of prepares us of what we're going to see starting our fall season, which is just around the corner.

Dr. Turck:

And how can flu shots help alleviate that burden on patients and the healthcare system as a whole?

Dr. Woc-Colburn:

Prevention is the best medicine, right? So we actually have a great tool to prevent influenza, which is the vaccine. This vaccine is very well-tolerated, has minimal side effects, and it has three strains in there. So in order to figure out what the strains are, they're made up in early January and that's how the vaccine's created. So this way is prevention. You get your flu shot and you get a couple of weeks for your immune system to build up good antibodies, so when you are challenged with flu during exposures—because we spend more time indoors and we have more gatherings and group gatherings—your body can fight it and don't end up in the hospital. So that's how the vaccine works and that's what keeps patients out of the hospitals. So getting a vaccine prevents us from being very sick later on in the year.

Dr. Turck:

For those just tuning in, you're listening to *VacciNation* on ReachMD. I'm Dr. Charles Turck, and I'm speaking with Dr. Laila Woc-Colburn about the importance of annual flu vaccination. So given the vaccine's role in reducing the overall health burden of the flu, let's focus on how we can integrate vaccination into routine patient care. Dr. Woc-Colburn, would you tell us about how we can best use appointment reminders to get patients thinking about their vaccination status?

Dr. Woc-Colburn:

Yeah. So awareness is a key part of this, and appointment reminders are a key part of that. It is a way for you to get a flag and say,

“Well, it’s that time of the year.” We get a lot of reminders. The most specific is when we start seeing the Christmas holiday items come up and you know that Christmas is coming around. So that’s one way of helping. The other one is to increase awareness, and so that’s with the appointment reminders. But you can also increase awareness by engaging the community and local organizations and letting them know that it’s flu season and start spreading the word.

Another great tool to remind people that flu season is here is using social media. So it’s through infographics. Also using, for example, other platforms to address when someone is coming in for an update from other vaccines, talk about the influenza vaccine. You know, doing things online like the other follow-ups. If the patient comes to your appointment and they’re not sure about getting the vaccine, do a follow-up, either through a phone call or a text or an email, to put the emphasis on the importance of staying up to date on the vaccines and the importance of being vaccinated for influenza so we don’t have a high-burden or a severe disease later on.

Dr. Turck:

And how about in-office discussions? How do you typically approach them and address any concerns a patient may have?

Dr. Woc-Colburn:

So again, the awareness starts the moment they come to the office, so have your staff already know that it’s vaccine time and you do an immunization campaign. By already providing information while they’re sitting outside and putting that out there, it engages them into that mind that a vaccine is coming. It also helps that you have built with them strong relationships. This fosters trust, and share personal experiences on an important vaccination for them to get through there. And then when you’re already with the patient, go over the immunizations and engage them on talks that it’s that time of the year and that as part of their annual labs, they have their annual vaccine coming up.

Dr. Turck:

And in addition to appointment reminders and in-office discussions, are there any other tools or strategies you use to help vaccines become part of every patient visit?

Dr. Woc-Colburn:

So if they can get the vaccines in the office, offer flexible schedules of vaccinations to accommodate different schedules. Remember: there’s other places that they can do vaccinations. Pharmacies do them, and mobile vaccination clinics, especially in the underserved areas, are a key point. Or sometimes you see them outside the supermarkets or the farmer’s markets where they can get vaccinated—just like we do our sexually transmitted disease testing, we can do that. So offering accessibility is a key point. Then actually doing advocacy, having policies to have access to vaccines for an underserved area or underserved minorities to be able to get them helps that along.

Dr. Turck:

And before we call this, Dr. Woc-Colburn, do you have any final thoughts on how we can best reiterate to the importance of annual flu shots to our patients?

Dr. Woc-Colburn

So the best thing is prevention. Prevention is the best medicine. Even though they feel a little sick after getting the vaccine, you can take some acetaminophen and hydrate, but then your body will be ready to come through the winter and not end up in the intensive care unit and spend the holidays with us.

Dr. Turck:

Those are great comments for us to consider as we come to the end of today’s program. And I want to thank my guest, Dr. Laila Woc-Colburn, for joining me to share strategies for integrating flu vaccination into every patient visit. Dr. Woc-Colburn, it was great having you on the program.

Dr. Woc-Colburn:

Thank you for having me.

Announcer:

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