

The Regrettable Lasker Award

By Luc Montagnier and James F. Holland

Drs. Douglas R. Lowy and John T. Schiller of the National Cancer Institute recently won the 2017 Lasker award for their work leading to the human papilloma virus (HPV) vaccine to prevent cervical cancer. In 1945, the Lasker award program began to spotlight fundamental biological discoveries and clinical developments that improve human health. We are deeply grateful for the critical role that such awards play.

After many years of work on viruses for Montagnier and cancer medicine for Holland, we are troubled, however, by the Lasker selection highlighting the HPV vaccine. While we acknowledge Drs. Lowy and Schiller's basic research, the HPV vaccine itself is not the "dream vaccine" that the Lasker jury suggests. On the contrary, controversy has erupted wherever it has been used. Previously healthy girls, boys and their families have reported grave injuries and deaths associated with the vaccine. And these reports are not merely anecdotal -- over 850 scientific articles on PubMed discuss the vaccine's adverse effects. Many scientists are studying associations between the vaccine and premature ovarian failure, chronic fatigue syndrome, complex regional pain syndrome, postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome, autoimmune disorders, neurological disorders and death.

The Lasker jury acknowledges that the vaccine's "presumptive ability to reduce malignancies will not become obvious until at least 2030." In other words, the vaccine has not yet prevented cervical cancer, despite more than 200 million doses administered. And although the vaccine's cancer-fighting benefit remains speculative, the Food and Drug Administration has already approved one HPV vaccine to prevent vulvar, vaginal and anal cancer as well.¹

Vaccines, like all medical interventions, require rigorous examination before widespread use, and this is especially so when healthy children are the recipients. One can only wonder why regulators and scientists did not do the rigorous safety testing needed before rolling out this vaccine, with its tragic consequences.

In clinical trials, the so-called "control" for the HPV vaccine was an injection containing the very same aluminum additive as in the vaccine itself. Thus, the so-called placebo masked adverse effects from the aluminum, which scientists recognize causes neurological and autoimmune side effects. Because both the "placebo" and HPV vaccine group had similar effects, the manufacturers dismissed them as trivial.

Even more disconcerting, HPV vaccine manufacturers acknowledge that they have never tested the vaccines for their ability to cause infertility or cancer in humans. Sadly, evidence suggests that it may cause both in some individuals.

¹ FDA Approval for Gardasil-9, 2014, <https://www.fda.gov/biologicsbloodvaccines/vaccines/approvedproducts/ucm426445.htm>.

Few media outlets have covered the HPV vaccine story. Since the FDA licensed the first HPV vaccine in 2006, India banned HPV vaccines for several years because of alleged unethical clinical trials in which seven girls reportedly died.² In 2014, Japan's Ministry of Health withdrew its recommendation for the HPV vaccine shortly after having recommended it in light of widespread injury claims. Colombia's Constitutional Court just ruled an HPV vaccine mandate unconstitutional. Injury victims have filed class action lawsuits against HPV vaccine manufacturers in Japan and Colombia. A victim in the U.S. has filed a suit against an HPV vaccine manufacturer for fraud and failure to provide information sufficient to permit true informed consent. Many other countries, including Denmark, Ireland and France, are in the midst of heated national debates about the vaccines' safety.

In the U.S. Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System that tracks reports of vaccine injury, there are currently 51,956 reports of injuries associated with HPV vaccines and 328 reports of deaths.³ The U.S. Vaccine Injury Compensation Program, where individuals can seek damages for vaccine injury, has paid out millions of dollars to settle HPV-related claims. It has settled two HPV-related death claims with payments of \$200,000, where the ceiling for such death benefits is \$250,000, permitting an inference that the vaccine may have been the primary contributor to death.

Although the National Cancer Institute, Drs. Lowy and Schiller's home institution, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention assert that the vaccines have excellent safety records, other scientists have found that the safety profile differs markedly from other FDA-approved vaccines. In a study of adverse vaccine events in the same age group, Drs. Tomljenovic and Shaw found that the HPV vaccine alone was associated with 65.9% of all serious adverse events, including 62% of all deaths, 66% of all life-threatening reactions, and 80% of all permanent disabilities, induced or associated with other vaccines administered to this age group.⁴

Despite obvious gaps in HPV vaccine safety testing, children and families who assert injury typically face doctors and institutions that marginalize and dismiss them. But just because information is unwelcome does not make it fake.

In 1950, the Lasker jury got it right when it gave it awarded George Papanicolaou for his Pap smear, a "relatively quick, easy and accurate test" for some types of cancer through cervical screening. According to the National Institutes of Health, the exceptionally safe

² Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare, 72nd Report on the *Alleged Irregularities in the Conduct of Studies Using Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) Vaccine by Programme for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH) in India*, August 2013, paras. 3.15 and 6.20, <http://164.100.47.5/newcommittee/reports/EnglishCommittees/Committee%20on%20Health%20and%20Family%20Welfare/72.pdf>.

³ Based on Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System data as of June 14, 2017, available at <http://www.medalerts.org/vaersdb/findfield.php>.

⁴ L. Tomljenovic and C. Shaw, "Adverse Reactions to Human Papillomavirus Vaccines," at 164 in Shoenfeld, Agmon-Levin and Tomljenovic, eds., *Vaccines and Autoimmunity*, 2015.

Pap smear reduced cervical cancer incidence and death rates by more than 60% in the United States from 1955 to 1992.⁵

Serious harmful effects and related deaths are not acceptable in vaccination. A safe HPV vaccine is certainly a very promising objective for public health, but so far the currently available HPV vaccines do not deserve this qualification, nor the honor of this prestigious scientific award.

Dr. Luc Montagnier received a 1986 Lasker Award and a 2008 Nobel Prize for his work on the human immunodeficiency virus as the cause of AIDS. Dr. James F. Holland received a 1972 Lasker Award for treatment of acute childhood leukemia.

⁵ NIH Fact Sheet, Cervical Cancer, <https://report.nih.gov/nihfactsheets/viewfactsheet.aspx?csid=76>.