

## HPV vaccine

**Chris Richards**, Newcastle paediatrician and Director of Lovewise, argues that immunising against cervical cancer is aiding and abetting sin.

I disagree with Trevor Stammers (*Triple Helix* 2006; Winter:7) that Christians should welcome the development and use of the HPV vaccine.

There are two biblical reasons against mass HPV immunisation of our young people. Both are based on the fact that Christians sin when they 'aid and abet' others to break God's commands.<sup>1</sup> Both Old and New Testament passages affirm fornication to be sinful.<sup>2</sup> 98% of cervical cancer is caused by genital HPV infection. Almost all such infections result from consensual fornication or adultery (with the exceptions of rape, incest and a faithful wife being infected by an adulterous husband). For this reason, providing such a vaccine to teenage girls will (except in these rare situations) anticipate fornication and therefore condone it. Christian doctors should have no part in this.

Those seeking to protect the faithful wife might propose immunising her or her husband after marriage. In so doing, however, they may be promoting promiscuity in the husband by immunising him, or in both by immunising her. In any case how many newly weds would knowingly consider immunisation where its only purpose anticipates their infidelity, so soon after making vows of absolute mutual trust?

Secondly, young people will perceive that the consequences of fornication have been lessened and therefore fornicate more. Stammers is correct in outlining the vaccine's limitations. But vaccines are never promoted on their weaknesses for obvious commercial and political reasons. The public health message employed to encourage uptake may be 'another triumph over cancer'. But the fact that prevention of this cancer is being attempted by preventing genital HPV will not be missed amongst our increasingly streetwise and promiscuous children – not least because HPV is the name of the vaccine. They will take home (and to bed) the message that safer sex is safer still. Epidemiological studies have shown that condom promotion increases rather than decreases STI acquisition, probably by increasing sexual activity through the false hope of consequenceless sex.<sup>3</sup> This vaccine will do the same.

It is another form of harm reduction strategy that may seem

enticing but actually leads to many more problems in the long term. Like condom promotion to the unmarried and clean needles for drug addicts, it is both unethical and damaging.<sup>4</sup>

**London GP Trevor Stammers replies.**

I have considerable sympathy with Chris Richards' concerns. However caution over the possible problems and inevitable media spin with mass vaccination should not necessarily lead Christians to fail to welcome the vaccine itself.

A few questions to put Richards' comments within a wider biblical perspective on living godly lives in a far-from-perfect world:

First, doesn't Jesus teach us that God 'causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good'<sup>5</sup> and even more outrageously, 'he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked'? Does this mean that the Lord is aiding and abetting sin?

Secondly, are the 'rare' exceptions that Chris also allows in order to protect the 'innocent' so very rare? There were 11,766 allegations of rape in 2002<sup>6</sup> and probably many more that were never reported. Adultery, secret as it is, is difficult to quantify but recent reports in the press suggest it is far from rare.<sup>7</sup>

I wish I could say that adultery is uncommon among Christians, but sadly there can hardly be a church in the UK of more than 100 members whose congregation is unaffected. Both as a local GP, and in conversations with leaders throughout the UK, I know of many cases, including those of Christian doctors. Wouldn't a good stoning have been a much better deterrent to casual sex than Jesus' gentle, 'Go now and leave your life of sin', spoken to the woman caught in adultery?<sup>8</sup> Who are we to begrudge, let alone deny, young girls throughout the world being protected against a killer disease that many will otherwise die of as victims of predatory men?

### references

1. Mark 9:42
2. Deuteronomy 22:20-21; 1 Corinthians 6:18
3. Paton D. *Random Behaviour Or Rational Choice? Family Planning, Teenage Pregnancy And STIs*. [www.loveforlife.org.uk/research/main.htm](http://www.loveforlife.org.uk/research/main.htm)
4. *Triple Helix* 2003; Autumn:11-13
5. Matthew 5:45
6. [news.independent.co.uk/uk/politics/article349758.ece](http://news.independent.co.uk/uk/politics/article349758.ece)
7. [www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,7-1267449,00.html](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,7-1267449,00.html)
8. John 8:11

## Tell us what you think!

### Letters

Many of our members have noticed, and some have commented on the fact that *Triple Helix* doesn't have a regular letters page. Rest assured, this is not for lack of wanting one. Quite simply, we don't have a regular letters column because it would be a blank feature for most issues. Some may argue that this is *because* it isn't a regular feature! Nonetheless, we want to address this issue.

Our editorial team receives very little written feedback, debate or comment. Our members' views and opinions do matter to us and we take all constructive comments seriously. The Christian Medical Fellowship is just that, a *fellowship* within which there is a range of opinion. We are keen to acknowledge diversity of views as none of

us has the monopoly on truth. We can receive letters by email, fax or post (contact details are on the inside front cover of each issue). If possible, letters should be succinct, factual and under 250 words. We try to edit them as little as possible but do retain the right to do so for clarity and length.

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