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Increasing the Uptake of Herpes Zoster Vaccinations via Community Pharmacies

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Background

- Herpes zoster (shingles) is a disease characterized by a painful skin rash and blistering.\(^1\)
- One million cases are estimated to occur annually in the United States, half of which are among the elderly.\(^1\)
- If untreated, 50% of persons ≥ 60 years old develop post-herpetic neuralgia (PHN), a debilitating syndrome that can persist for years.\(^2\)
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends the herpes zoster vaccine to persons aged ≥ 60 years to reduce the risk of shingles and PHN\(^2\); however, coverage levels are estimated at only 15.8%.\(^3\)
- Physicians typically do not stock the vaccine due to cost, storage requirements, and limited shelf life.\(^4,5\)
- Pharmacists at retail pharmacies are uniquely positioned to administer these vaccinations and to share vaccination records with patients’ physicians.\(^6\)
- Traditionally, pharmacists provided vaccinations only per physician’s order.\(^7\)
- Recently, Massachusetts (May 2012), Florida (July 2012), and New York (October 2012) passed legislation allowing pharmacists to administer herpes zoster vaccinations per protocol or with a patient-specific prescription.\(^7\)

Objective

- To investigate the uptake of herpes zoster vaccinations in community pharmacies and the influence of state-authorized pharmacist immunization privileges on vaccination uptake rates.
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Methods

- This cross-sectional study analyzed herpes zoster vaccination records from 2012 administered at the Walgreens pharmacy chain.
- Vaccination uptake rates were calculated as the number of patients aged ≥60 years who received a herpes zoster vaccine per 1,000 pharmacy patients ≥60 years filling a prescription for any medication at Walgreens during the study period.
- Rates of vaccinations were examined three months before and after implementation of pharmacist immunization privilege for herpes zoster in Massachusetts (May 2012), Florida (July 2012), and New York (October 2012).

Results

- In Massachusetts, the rate of herpes zoster vaccinations per 1,000 pharmacy patients increased from 3.3 to 28.1 after pharmacists were authorized to administer vaccinations under a protocol, a 745% increase (P<.001).
- In Florida, the vaccination rate increased from 3.4 to 16.2, a 377% increase (P<.001).
- In New York, vaccination rate increased 803% from 1.3 to 11.6 (P<.001). These states authorized pharmacists to administer vaccinations with a patient-specific prescription.

Conclusions

- After the legislation, study pharmacies had a significantly higher rate of herpes zoster vaccinations than prior to the legislation. Uptake rate was highest in Massachusetts, which granted pharmacists full authorization to administer the vaccinations.
- Results suggest that community pharmacists provided additional access and convenience to herpes zoster vaccinations for high-risk populations, resulting in increased uptake.
- Given the suboptimal vaccination rate of herpes zoster, states with limited or no immunization authorization for pharmacists should consider expanding pharmacist privileges.

References:
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