

News from the group January 2024 – Cervical Cancer Awareness Month

The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) marks January the Cervical Cancer Awareness Month, underscoring the need for joined global efforts to eliminate cervical cancer once and for all by the end of the century¹. Cervical cancer is primarily caused by high-risk human papillomavirus (HPV) infections and is not only treatable but also highly preventable through the HPV vaccine. Nevertheless, in 2020 approximately 604.000 women were diagnosed, and 342.000 deaths have been reported due to cervical cancer predominantly in low- and middle-income countries.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) calls for scaling up screening, improving the HPV vaccination coverage and enhancing affordable treatment access, leading to HPV related cervical cancer elimination by 2100. Despite the introduction of HPV vaccinations in 2006, the impending shortage of doses raises concerns about equitable access.

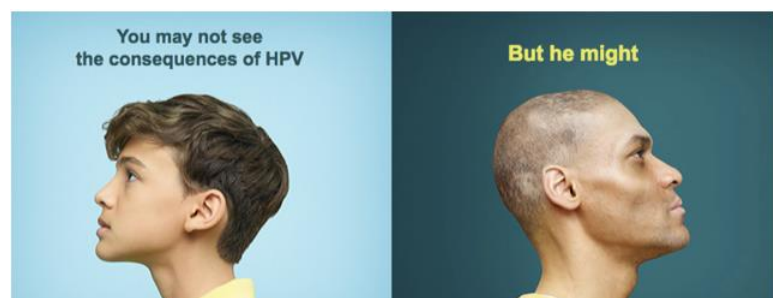


Picture 1. Impressions from colposcopy training in Madagascar.

The Fusco Research Group is determined to contribute to the WHO's goal through various projects and initiatives in Madagascar, a country with a high incidence of HPV-related cervical cancer yet lacking the HPV vaccine.

In the past years, the group has started projects to assess the prevalence of HPV infection, indicating towards a prevalence of 40 per cent in the population. Given the scarcity of screening programs, the group explores integrated services at the primary health care level to address multiple gynaecological disorders and enhance accessibility. Alongside, the study of strategies for vaccine implementation, including evaluating circulating HPV serotypes and gauging knowledge and willingness for the vaccination have been implemented by the group. Further, the group has conducted a study assessing the variability of vaginal microbiome in presence of an HPV infection to identify possible markers that can help in the prevention of the infection and/or its clearance.

Conducting a systemic literature review, the group has identified opportunities to enhance HPV vaccination coverage in sub-Saharan Africa, emphasising health literacy, health system strengthening, and social and political integration.



Picture 2. HPV vaccination campaign by MERCK (<https://www.merckvaccines.com/gardasil9/>)

The Fusco Research group is full-heartedly committed to join the HPV awareness month under the slogan “Learn – Prevent – Screen”.

1. WHO. IARC marks Cervical Cancer Awareness Month 2024. *The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC)* <https://www.iarc.who.int/featured-news/iarc-marks-cervical-cancer-awareness-month-2024/> (2024).