

Small decision, big impact : promoting influenza vaccination uptake among health care workers

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Valorization

Valorization addendum

The research project presented in this dissertation has a clear social and economic relevance, in addition to the scientific relevance. As is explained in the dissertation, national and international Health Authorities, as well as researchers from different fields have identified the problem of low influenza vaccination uptake rates among health care workers (HCWs) and recommend annual vaccination of this group. In short, the reasons why influenza vaccination uptake has to be higher among HCWs are:

- 1) Influenza vaccination uptake of HCWs prevents the transmission of influenza to vulnerable patients and thereby decreases morbidity and mortality associated with influenza.
- 2) Influenza vaccination uptake protects HCWs, who have a more than three times higher risk of contracting influenza.
- 3) Influenza vaccination uptake of HCWs will reduce the economic burden of annual influenza epidemics by reducing costs associated with influenza-related medical treatments and work-absenteeism.

Furthermore, influenza vaccination is effective, cheap, safe, and easy to apply. The people who suffer the most from the low vaccination uptake of HCWs are the vulnerable patients they care for. Over and above having an increased risk to suffer from severe, sometimes life-threatening consequences following infection with influenza, people with a weakened immune system have been shown to be less well protected by influenza vaccination themselves. They therefore need the extra protection from people in their environment – so-called herd-immunity. They should not have to worry whether it is safe for them to receive medical treatment.

Despite existing programs to increase uptake, influenza vaccination coverage rates stay too low. We therefore investigated the social-cognitive variables associated with HCWs' motivation to get vaccinated in three European countries and developed a cost-effective behavior change program to promote influenza vaccination uptake among this group. Moreover, the program can easily be implemented and maintained by hospitals without much external assistance. A vaccination program that is easy to implement and successful in increasing vaccination rates is in the interest of:

- Patients and their relatives, who have a decreased risk of acquiring influenza in the hospital;
- HCWs, their colleagues, and their relatives, because they also have a decreased risk to get infected with influenza;
- Occupational health physicians (or other people responsible for offering annual influenza vaccination) who are looking for a way to promote influenza vaccination uptake among their HCWs;
- Hospitals (and other health care facilities), because they can increase patient safety, reduce costs associated with influenza outbreaks, and decrease influenza-related work-absenteeism;

- And Health Authorities and governments, because vaccination pursues their goal of decreasing morbidity, mortality, and socioeconomic costs associated with annual influenza epidemics.

The developed program can be called innovative, because it is a radically different approach compared to the existing programs. Most of the existing programs are complex, multifaceted interventions that require much effort to implement and are basically impossible to maintain by the health care facilities without external assistance. Our program included only two components – education through a presentation and personalized email appointments for influenza vaccination sent with an online tool. They are easy to implement and the only extra costs generated are those of ordering enough vaccines so that everybody who wishes to get vaccinated can get vaccinated.

This dissertation will amongst others be made available to the academic community, health care providers, such as hospitals, public health agencies, and Abbott Health Care Products B. V., who funded this research project with an unrestricted educational grant. Thereby, the insights we established in this project will be distributed and shared, which will in the ideal case lead to continuation of research in this field as proposed in chapter 8 of this dissertation, and to the implementation and maintenance of the proposed behavior change program.