

New Zealand Doctor Latest News

Official HPV DVD gets 'not achieved'
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News
Amanda Cameron

An official DVD about the cervical cancer vaccine has been criticised for containing "childish errors".

The 10-minute DVD, which encourages teenage girls to get the funded vaccine Gardasil, is being shown to secondary school girls throughout the country and is available on Auckland DHB's "One for the girls" website (www.oneforthegirls.org.nz).

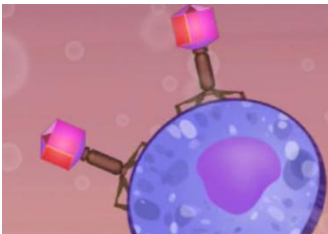
However, Taranaki science teacher Michael Fenton has complained to the Ministry of Health that the DVD contains several basic scientific errors.

Mr Fenton, who has a master's degree in science and teaches at Inglewood High School, says the animations depicting the human papillomavirus (HPV) and human cells are "flash looking but totally incorrect".

First, the "squid-like creature swimming around" that is meant to represent the HPV virus looks more like a bacteria-eating phage, he says.



Second, these "squiddy little animals" are shown attaching to and destroying cells rather than replicating themselves and affecting cell division.



Third, human cells are depicted as having cell walls, which are only present in bacterial and plant cells.

"The DVD video animation was so bad that students at a local high school noticed the glaring errors," Mr Fenton writes on his science website (Nexus Research Group).

The New Zealand Microbiological Society also has concerns about the DVD, says president Phil Bremer.

Mr Fenton emailed the ministry's deputy director-general information, Alan Hesketh, last month asking that the errors be acknowledged or corrected.

"Information provided to the public should be accurate if provided by an organisation that claims to be a trusted authority," Mr Fenton wrote. "I hope you accept my sincere attempts to correct an issue that may only give support to those that already look for reasons to not vaccinate."

On his website he notes the ministry's chief advisor population health, Greg Simmons, has conceded the issues raised are important.

In a written statement, Dr Simmons says the animation is a stylised, simplified overview suitable for the audience the DVD was made for. Mr Fenton's comments will be taken into account when the DVD is reviewed at the beginning of the first term of 2010, he says.

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