

Mother's concern over anti-cancer jab for girls

By Tom Ramage

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PARENTS in Badenoch and Strathspay are being advised to request patient information leaflets on an anti-cancer vaccination before signing their children up to it.

The advice has come from health campaigners who have visited towns and villages throughout the strath in recent weeks including Kingussie, Grantown and Nethy Bridge to highlight their experiences with Cervarix.

It has been widely administered to 12 and 13-year-old girls as part of a UK immunisation programme. Their concerns for the treatment remains for the vaccine which recently superseded it, Gardasil.

The companies behind both insist their vaccines offer protection from the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), the most common cause of cervical cancer, and the UK and Scottish governments as well as local health chiefs have maintained they are perfectly safe.

However, Sherrell Halliday said that thousands of recipients reported a wide range of adverse reactions to Cervarix including her daughter, Deborah, and she had serious concerns over the possibility of side-effects of the new drug.

When the family's poster-packed campaign vehicle spread its message in Kingussie's High Street, Mrs Halliday's 16-year-old daughter Deborah told the "Strathy": "My life was turned upside down after I took the first two jags of the three-jag course. There were so many problems and I was in such pain that I really thought I would end up in a wheelchair for the rest of my life.

"I just don't want any other girls to go through what I did. We need to help them help themselves."

Deborah continued: "I was in terrible pain and I still suffer, although I'm more stable now that doctors finally began to listen to me. But since I've



CONCERNED PARENT: Mrs Halliday and her daughters Kathryn (left) and Derorah (right) in Kingussie.

been through hell I'm desperate to stop others going through it.

"I had no choice - we simply didn't know any better and there was no one to warn us - but now we do know more and we simply have to offer other girls the choice.

"They must decide for themselves whether they want to take this drug or not."

The Halliday family, from Nairn, have been touring the country in their own research programme and have now extended it to Badenoch and Strathspay.

Mrs Halliday said: "We want to know if anyone in the strath has encountered similar problems. We would like them to contact us."

She has had to nurse her daughter for two years after, within hours of the initial injection, Deborah experienced muscle pain, swollen joints and stiff

limbs. Severe fatigue set in over the next three months. She also suffered chest compression, low blood sugar, headaches, dizziness and nausea.

Mrs Halliday explained: "Even though they have switched from Cervarix to Gardasil, both vaccines contain aluminium, which is a heavy metal and neurotoxin which can cause death of brain cells.

"Both carry mild to severe side effects leaving a devastating impact on some children while others do not seem to be affected.

"The side effects of Cervarix and Gardasil are similar, with reports of abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, lip swelling and general disorders including malaise, abnormal sensations, injection site reactions, chest discomfort, immune system disorders.

"In some children there have been muscle and tissue disorders including

arthritis and myalgia, and some nervous system disorders such as paralysis and seizures. Our research has also noted certain psychiatric disorders including anxiety and panic attacks."

Mrs Halliday was also accompanied on her Badenoch visit by her younger daughter, Kathryn - who has refused the old and now the new vaccination.

She is convinced the problem for Deborah was aluminium poisoning. The antidote was water and foods rich in silica, she said, along with both physio and hydrotherapy.

"But we believe all the problems can be avoided if more is known about the way drugs can affect some girls. Many are unaffected, yes, but what of those who are vulnerable? We all need to know more about what's going on.

"Children have a right to patient information leaflets and they must start asking for them."

No local problems

IT is understood that local GPs have witnessed no problems like those reported by the Halliday family. One told the Strathy: "I think the vaccine used now immunises against more strains of HPV, so was adopted as it offers even more protection.

"It's all good news, as both vaccines are effective. Cervical cancer is a major and avoidable disease which the vaccines should prevent happening.

"The concern ought to be about avoiding the sort of negative publicity that MMR got some years back. The UK is now paying for that via a measles outbreak in Wales.

"Would a cervical cancer sufferer have wanted to get the vaccine as a teenager? It's a no-brainer - of course she would. It's an awful disease, often fatal, difficult to treat, yet could be prevented."

Positive outlook

CERVARIX was replaced in the vaccination programme with Gardasil in September 2012. Its safety experience during the vaccination programme "supports previous conclusions that the benefit/risk balance remained positive," said the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency.

A spokesman said: "Gardasil is a scientifically proven vaccine that has been extensively used in other European countries and the USA, with tens of millions of people vaccinated.

"The benefits associated with Gardasil far outweigh the risk of serious side effects, which are rare. We closely monitor all emerging evidence and we will take action when we need to and people should speak to their doctor if they have concerns."

Anyone wanting to share any experiences with the Hallidays can contact the campaign at fredajejan@bopenworld.com They can check other children's adverse reactions on www.sanevax.org

ABHAYADEVI Tissington, NHS Highland's Nurse Consultant (Health Protection), told the Strathy: "There is a wealth of evidence demonstrating that the vaccines (both Cervarix and Gardasil) which protect against cervical cancer are safe and effective.

"In the first four years of the immunisation programme over 6 million doses of Cervarix were given across the UK, and there were no more adverse reactions than expected.

"The majority of reactions are recognised side effects such as injection site reaction, fever, nausea, headache and dizziness.

"Other more unusual reported reactions were investigated by the MHRA. For example, a number of girls were reported to have Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (post-viral fatigue). However, investigation demonstrated that following the introduction of the HPV vaccine, the number of girls suffering from this condition has been no more than the usual background level.

"There is no evidence that such conditions were caused by the vaccine. Vaccine uptake amongst girls in NHS Highland has been high - over 80 per cent complete the three dose course each year, and we are confident that girls and their parents will continue to say yes to the vaccine that protects against the two types of HPV that cause 75 per cent of the cases of cervical

