



# HPV vaccine hitting bumps on road to Mass. approval

Liz Hoffman

When a vaccine gets reviews this wonderful, it's a little surprising that it would receive such lukewarm receptions in state houses across the country.

In all, 17 states have passed legislation that would require, fund or educate the public about Gardasil, Merck & Co.'s vaccine against human papillomavirus (HPV), a sexually transmitted disease responsible for 70 percent of cervical cancer cases in the United States.

But the process of the vaccine's spread has been slow, despite approval by the Food and Drug Administration last summer.

A year has passed since the nation's first

bill mandating vaccination was introduced in Michigan. Five months have passed since Virginia became the first state to pass such a bill into law.

And then there's Texas, where Gov. Rick Perry last February issued an executive order requiring all sixth-grade girls to receive the vaccination, only to have the state legislature file a bill several months later prohibiting such a requirement. Perry quickly gave up the fight.

Massachusetts is still putting up a fight. A national leader in public health and home of the most successful school immunization program in the country, Massachusetts has unchar-

acteristically lagged behind in the national debate over Gardasil.

State Sen. Richard Moore, D-Uxbridge, proposed a bill in January that would require all girls entering sixth grade to receive the vaccine. If passed, Massachusetts would join Virginia, New Jersey and Indiana in making immunization a requirement for entering school.

"Anytime we can make progress in the fight against cancer, we ought to take advantage of it," Moore said.

Commission on Cervical Cancer and a supporter of the bill. "This is a no-brainer."

The measure, Senate Bill No. 102, was referred to the Health Care Financing Committee, of which Moore is the chairman and on which Candaras sits. The committee heard testimony at a meeting on July 11, but has not scheduled a vote and Moore said that he will not move forward with the bill until funding is available.

That funding has come and gone

once already. Gov. Deval Patrick allocated \$24.8 million in his budget recommendation last February to augment the state's immunization program, and specifically included money for 72,000 girls between the ages of 9 and 18

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In 2007, an estimated 11,150 new cases of cervical cancer will be diagnosed in this country, and roughly 3,700 women will die of the disease, according to the American Cancer Society. The incidence and death rates for cervical cancer are higher for blacks and Hispanics than for whites. The incidence of cervical cancer is highest in Hispanics, but blacks die of cervical cancer at a rate 35 percent higher than Hispanics and more than twice the rate of whites.

"You're talking about a disease that is 100 percent eradicate-able," said state Sen. Gale Candaras, D-Wilbraham, chair of the state's Special

to receive the vaccine.

The proposal was rejected by the state Legislature.

"We haven't given up and we'll keep trying," Candaras said. "I've spoken with the governor and he's like-minded. This is too important to get squashed by budget problems."

The medical benefits appear overwhelmingly clear. Based on data from preliminary studies, Gardasil is nearly 100 percent effective against the two strands of HPV that are responsible for 70 percent of all cervical cancers. It is 99 percent effective against the strands that cause 90 percent of

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Gov. Deval Patrick delivers remarks to job seekers during the networking reception that followed the Bay State Banner's Diversity Today Career Explosion, held last Thursday at the Boston Marriott Copley Place Exhibition Hall. (Don West photo)

# Banner job fair shows link between will, work

Howard Manly

Deval Patrick likes telling the story of overcoming obstacles.

He told it again last week to close the Bay State Banner's Diversity Today Career Explosion job fair. More than 400 job aspirants had spent the preceding four hours with about 40 Boston-area corporations talking about their skills and reviewing a variety of jobs, everything from senior management positions at Genzyme to entry-level positions at Amtrak.

Patrick had a sense of what needed to be said and talked about the early days of his campaign.

"I was told it wasn't my time," Patrick said, recalling the initial reactions of many as he began the process of

seeking his new job.

The point was clear: Never surrender, especially when it comes to looking for a new job.

Such was the case with Cheryl Holmes. She received a Ph.D. in sociology from Boston College in 2005 and has worked for years in the field, including stints at the Harvard School of Public Health and with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts assessing the state's contracts with minority- and women-owned businesses.

She said in an e-mail that she initially felt frustrated that some of the corporations appeared non-responsive. All of that changed the day after the job fair, when she received a telephone call from one of the corpo-

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# 826 Boston inspires writing at BPS schools

Brian Mickelson

Two men stand just inside the entranceway of the building at 3035 Washington Street in Roxbury. They talk excitedly, exchanging ideas and gesturing to the bare, brightly colored walls.

Their subject, strangely enough, is cryptozoology, defined as "the study of evidence tending to substantiate the existence of, or the search for, creatures whose reported existence is unproved, such as the Abominable Snowman, Bigfoot or the Loch Ness monster."

To understand how this applies to 826 Boston, the new writing and tutoring center in Egleston Square, requires, well, a little imagination.

Daniel Johnson, executive director

of 826 Boston, speaks passionately of his writing center's mission — helping students between the ages of 6 and 18 with their expository and creative writing skills through one-on-one attention, as well as helping teachers inspire their students to write.

The process of helping students become better writers, Johnson says, is "like hunting for Bigfoot. It may or may not be out there, but you have to keep searching."

In other words, writing is hard. It takes time and patience.

Jon Racek, a local artist and one of the first volunteers at 826 Boston, agrees. He has come on board to help design the center's "retail store." His decorative accents include unicorns, hanging animal skeletons and a large,

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Hip-hop star L.L. Cool J (right) leads attendees through a morning fitness session during "Life@50+," the AARP's national event and expo, held earlier this month at the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center. (Photo courtesy of BCEC)

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