Genital Warts: Stepwise Approach to Cure

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Genital warts or venereal warts are the most common sexually-transmitted disease caused by the non-oncogenic human papillomavirus (HPV) [1]. Genital warts are highly contagious and sexual contact should be avoided when genital warts are present. Canadians, especially younger Canadians, perceive genital warts with a fair degree of social stigma and genital warts have a negative impact on their psyche [2]. It is essential to note that there is no single effective cure for genital warts and that recurrence is always a possibility [3,4]. As such, genital warts are associated with a significant burden of illness and costs to the healthcare system [5].

Current therapeutic options include surgical and non-surgical strategies [3]. Surgical strategies include ablation/excisional therapies. Ablative/excisional therapies include cryotherapy, laser treatment, electrosurgery and scissor excision. In Canada, cryotherapy, freezing the wart using liquid nitrogen is the most common procedure and is commonly done in physicians’ offices. Response rates are high with few side effects.

Non-surgical treatments include cytotoxic agents and immunomodulators. Cytotoxic agents such as podophyllum resin, podophyllotoxin, and trichloroacetic acid are common agents. Podophyllum resin and trichloroacetic acid are topically applied at home. Immunomodulators such as Imiquimod (Aldara®), interferon alpha-n3 (Roferon A®), and 5-fluorouracil (Efudex®) are available in Canada. Local side effects such as erythema, oedema, itching and pain can occur with all treatments [4].

With the numerous challenges surrounding the treatment of genital warts along with the negative impact they have on the psychology of infected individuals, the primary prevention of HPV infection through vaccination is a key component in decreasing the incidence of the disease.

References

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