

# Katie, we re so disappointed: Couric mangles the science behind the HPV vaccine

By ACSH Staff — December 5, 2013



We were very disappointed in Katie Couric's [segment](#)

[yesterday](#) <sup>[1]</sup> on her daytime talk show, Katie, discussing the controversy over the vaccine against human papillomavirus (HPV). The show featured two women: one, a mother who claimed that the vaccine killed her daughter; the other, a woman who claimed that the vaccine caused her to suffer from debilitating illness. A medical expert, Dr. Diane Harper, the chair of family and geriatric medicine at the University of Louisville, was on the show to comment. Although she helped test the vaccine, now believes that it's over-marketed and its benefits oversold. Another expert, Dr. Mallika Marshall of Harvard Medical School, who actually spoke in favor of the vaccine, only appeared on the show's website. Clearly, this presented an unbalanced picture to the public, leading viewers to believe that the vaccine is dangerous despite opposite views by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

According to Matthew Herper in [his excellent piece](#) [2] in *Forbes*, Couric erred on four main points. First, she downplayed the effectiveness of the vaccine, claiming that it is only effective for five years due to the fact that at one point the only data available had measured the vaccine's effectiveness up to five years after receiving vaccine. Despite those studies, experts say that antibody levels indicate that immunity will last beyond this. Second, she overplayed the power of pap smears, claiming that pap smears and DNA testing can detect all cervical cancer cases. She ignores the point that many individuals do not receive screening, and no test has a 100 percent detection rate. Third, she underplayed the actual risk of cancer, despite the fact that the CDC estimates there were about 12,000 cases of cervical cancer and 11,700 cases of head and neck cancer caused by HPV between 2004 and 2008. And lastly, although she pulled at viewers' heartstrings with emotional stories about the dangers of the vaccine, she never acknowledged the emotional stories of those who have suffered from cancer and may have been saved by the vaccine.

Herper goes on to emphasize that studies have consistently shown that there is no link between HPV vaccines and serious side effects. And furthermore, the vaccine is even performing better than expected. According to Thomas Frieden, the director of the CDC, prevalence of HPV infection in girls and women fell 56% to 5.1% of the population.

This is clearly another example of a celebrity getting it wrong when it comes to the science, and would make a great addition to a new [Celebrities Vs. Science](#) [3] publication, in which we here at ACSH respond to one celebrity doozy of a comment at a time.

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**Links**

[1] <http://blogs.plos.org/thepanicvirus/2013/12/03/katie-couric-promotes-dangerous-fear-mongering-with-show-on-the-hpv-vaccine/>

[2] <http://www.forbes.com/sites/matthewherper/2013/12/04/four-ways-katie-couric-stacked-the-deck-against-gardasil/>

[3] <http://acsh.org/2011/01/acsh-presents-celebrities-vs-science/>