

Special Session 1: Social justice and Diversity

Title: Locating disease and inequity: Vaccines, cancer and politics of prevention in Colombia

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Abstract

This paper analyses the discourses on cervical cancer and vaccines as the framework used in the production of narratives about HPV vaccines in Colombia. I use the terms politics of disease and politics of prevention in order to describe the arrangements of objects, narratives, stories and institutions that are involved in contemporary perceptions on cervical cancer and vaccines. Drawing on STS and medical anthropology contributions but also empirical material (interviews, policy documents, medical papers, campaign material) I describe the tensions that make vaccines a contested technology and cervical cancer a marginal disease. On the other hand, cervical cancer has a particular history as a malady associated with poverty and sexual stigma. I discuss the permanence of these narratives in the contemporary policies and practices on cervical cancer and development, taking as reference point the experience of Colombia. In Colombia these narratives are penetrated by the problem of development as a concern that frames policy, technology and state intervention.

HPV vaccines establish a connection between the worlds of cervical cancer and vaccines; I will address some implications of this connection. It is not my intention to provide a detailed history of cervical cancer, vaccines and HPV vaccines; rather I attempt to depict how disease and prevention constitute contexts for practices of calculation such as cost-effectiveness analysis within the technological selection of healthcare technologies and their incorporation in Public Health programmes.