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Review Hum Reprod. 1991 Jan;6(1):166-72. doi: 10.1093/oxfordjournals.humrep.a137252.

The WHO Task Force on Vaccines for Fertility Regulation. Its Formation, Objectives and Research Activities

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Abstract

Over the past 18 years, the WHO Task Force on Vaccines for Fertility Regulation has been supporting basic and clinical research on the development of birth control vaccines directed against the gametes or the preimplantation embryo. These studies have involved the use of advanced procedures in peptide chemistry, hybridoma technology and molecular genetics as well as the evaluation of a number of novel approaches in general vaccinology. As a result of this international, collaborative effort, a prototype anti-HCG vaccine is now undergoing clinical testing, raising the prospect that a totally new family planning method may be available before the end of the current decade.

PIP: The WHO Task Force on Vaccines for Fertility Regulation is one of several Task Forces, consisting of international, multidisciplinary groups of scientists and clinicians collaborating in research on specific goals, established in 1972. Its accomplishments are reviewed here. The Task Force convened a meeting in 1974 to select criteria for tissues and molecules capable of mounting antifertility responses. These molecules had to be restricted to the target tissue, sequestered in the reproductive tract, present transiently, and chemically characterized. Some of the antigens considered were sperm enzymes and membranes, as well as a data bank of sera naturally immunized against sperm. Other were anti-ovum and placenta molecules such as zona pellucida, the SP-1 placental antigen, and the placental hormones chorionic somatotrophin and human chorionic gonadotropin (hCH). Trophoblast-derived monoclonal antibodies and gene libraries are being screened. Anti-hCH is the vaccine composed of a portion of the beta subunit complexed to a carrier antigen, diphtheria toxoid, in a water- oil emulsion with an adjuvant has been tested in a phase I clinical trial in 1986-1988. A Phase II trial is being planned to see if the immune response in women is large enough to be capable of preventing pregnancy. Further improvements in the vaccine are being envisioned, such as incorporation of the peptide carrier conjugate and immune stimulant into biodegradable microspheres, hopefully to produce a longer-lasting immunity and a more stable vaccine. While the WHO Task Force on Vaccines for Fertility Regulation has been forced to cut back on some avenues of research, its success has stimulated other centers to take up several important projects, e.g. the sperm LDH and zona pellucida vaccines.

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