

Healthcare is selfcare.

THE PODCAST



Transcript - Episode 7: Not throwing away my shot.

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Ballard: If there's one thing we've learned it's that taking care of ourselves is key. And there are a lot of ways to do that. Selfcare has come to mean taking time for the things that make us happy, for the things that make us feel good, and for the things that keep us healthy. Healthcare is Selfcare Podcast presented by Singer River Health System focuses on candid conversations with medical professionals aimed at improving health and saving lives. So sit back, grab a cup of coffee, and prioritize you.

Finan: Well, thanks for having me Aloysius, I appreciate it. I'm Mike Finan, and I am a Gynecological Oncologist. I practice at Singing River Health System on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Originally, I am from New Orleans, born and raised in New Orleans, and trained at LSU Medical School in Shreveport. Then did my residency and fellowship in Tampa. Did my fellowship at the Moffitt Cancer Center in Tampa. I'm thrilled to be here today!

Ballard: Dr. Finan, you are a man that is a ball of energy—for one. But, I think one of the things I love about you the most is that you're always champion of the people. You always try to find some way to enhance our community, to educate, to uplift. And that's what I want to talk about today. I have a topic I would like you to help me break down and discuss. What is HPV?

Finan: Sure. Well, HPV is a very, very common infection, actually—it's a virus. And it affects literally hundreds of millions of people worldwide. And in the United States, more than half of the population carries HPV. It's ubiquitous. It affects just about every group in America. It's really hard to escape it, but not impossible. We can control it, but it is a virus, essentially.

Ballard: So what causes HPV?

Finan: It's actually sexually transmitted. So, that's one of the issues that raises people's awareness. It's a sexually transmitted virus.

Ballard: I did not know that. So, before we get too far into this, let's talk about this. What does HPV actually stand for?

Finan: Great question. It stands for Human Papilloma Virus. "H" is "human", "P" is "papilloma", and "V" is the virus".

Ballard: Ok. Because I know sometimes we move through medical terminology and we don't get a real understanding of what that is. Now, you said this is a sexually transmitted disease and that most of the population carries it.

Finan: Right.

Ballard: So where does it stem from?

Finan: Well, the reason it's so common is it's usually asymptomatic. Many, many people are carriers but don't have symptoms. And, you know, your listeners should be familiar with that. With COVID, you know, many people carried COVID and were asymptomatic—and many viruses are like that. They sort of live below the surface and don't cause symptoms in most people.

Ballard: Now, with that being said—just like COVID untreated—certain things can go bad.

Finan: Exactly.

Ballard: So what happens when we leave HPV untreated?

Finan: Well, it can be anything. It can range from genital warts, which is the mildest form, all the way to

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cancer, which is obviously deadly, and which is why I'm involved.

Ballard: So, I don't want everybody getting all worried and bent out of shape. You said it can be controlled.

Finan: Right, so the way to control it in the population is with a simple vaccine. There's a vaccine called Gardasil. Let's back up a step. There are multiple types of HPV. Just like we've learned that there are multiple types of COVID. Most viruses undergo transformation. And for HPV, each type is named with a number. So there's HPV 10, 11... All the numbers you can think of up to roughly 50 or 60 different types. And there are only a handful of viral types, though, that cause cancer. And there's a vaccine that covers those viral types. And it has almost 100% protection.

Ballard: So, let's talk about worst case scenarios, because someone listening may not know that this could be the cause of what they're dealing with. What are some symptoms for someone who may be on the cancer side of it?

Finan: Right. So, go into the worst case scenario, it can cause cervical cancer, vulvar cancer, vaginal cancer in women. So those are the three cancers that women would be affected by. But also it can cause head and neck cancers in women and men. And that comes obviously from oral sex. So head and neck cancers can present either at the at the base of the tongue or the larynx--cancers of the vocal cords. So that can present. I'm obviously not an Ear, Nose, and Throat doctor. I'm at the other end of the body, a gynecologist. So, I can't really speak in too much detail to that. But hoarseness, a lump, anything that's unusual in your mouth, throat or neck would be something you'd want to get checked out.

And then for women, the most common symptom is bleeding and particularly bleeding after sex. Now, fortunately for women, we have pap smears. And if a woman has a pap smear on a regular basis, it's not a guarantee that she won't get cancer. But it's as close as you can get because

you can pick it up in the pre-cancerous phase.

Ballard: So then, when you're looking at these things in these different scenarios on the cancer side, how would you treat someone who has gotten to that point?

Finan: Well, hopefully it's caught early and surgery would be an option. So if it's a vulvar cancer, which is cancer on a woman's bottom, you know, the area outside the vagina, that would generally appear as a lump and a lump that doesn't go away. And hopefully she goes in to see her gynecologist. The gynecologist does a biopsy, shows cancer, sends the patient to me.

I do surgery and get it all out. And that's all that she needs. Taking taking cervical cancer as an as an option or as a possibility, let's say a woman has bleeding after intercourse, which is called post-coital bleeding and goes in and the doctor does a biopsy of the cervix and finds cancer. Hopefully, it's caught early and the the woman gets referred to me or a doctor like me and we can do surgery. In advance stages, then we have to use radiation therapy and chemotherapy. And unfortunately, most cervical cancers that are detected with bleeding or advanced cancers, unfortunately, most of them are stage three or stage four. If you wait to the point where you're bleeding, then it's generally going to be advanced. So that's why I would encourage all of your listeners to go in and get their pap smear.

And I think the bit the most important message I would have is for women who have finished having their children. I can't tell you how many women I see that have cervical cancer or some other cancer of the female organs, and they haven't seen a gynecologist since they had their last child. That's very common.

Ballard: Well, we want to be proactive in our healthcare I know with even with COVID or most viruses, there's a screening or a test that you can take. Is there a test you can take to make sure, male or female, that you are not having issues with HPV?

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Finan: Yes. I can't speak to males because I don't care for males. Well, I shouldn't say that I don't care for males. I care about you. *laughs* That didn't come out right.

Ballard: We know what you're saying.

Finan: As a gynecologist, I don't see male patients. In fact, I have to say, it kind of creeps me out just thinking about taking care of a male, because my whole career, I've just taken care of women. But yes, we can do HPV testing. It goes along with a pap smear. It's the same test as a pap smear. Nowadays, the test is put in a liquid. We take a sample from the cervix, we put it in a liquid and it can be sent for a pap smear and or HPV testing. And we probably should talk a little bit about a pap smear. For your listeners basically to do a pap smear, we do a pelvic exam—we look at the cervix—so, we're looking for any abnormalities, and we're looking also at the vulva and vagina for any lumps, bumps, or anything that bleeds. So it's important to have that physical exam and look, because not everything is picked up with a pap smear, they're not perfect. And then we take the sample, we put it in liquid and we send it off and they look at the cells. They look at the actual cells that are in the liquid and they're looking for any cells that look pre-cancerous.

Ballard: OK, so now let me make sure because even though I'm not a woman--my wife--I'm thinking from a husband's perspective. Is that something she needs to ask to be added to her pap smear? Or is that something commonly just automatically done.

Finan: It's automatically done. So the main message, I think, to any woman is go in yearly for your annual exam. At least starting at the age of 21 or 25 at the latest. They don't recommend that the teenagers go in any more because there doesn't seem to be any benefit unless unless a teenager is having problems. But a woman over the age of 21 should go in at least annually for an exam.

Especially coming off of the last two years where a lot of people have missed their annual checkups and screenings, I think it's very important what you're saying to just make that appointment and go get your pap smear. And actually most gynecologists also serve as sort of a primary care physician. So they are going to also be up to date on other healthcare recommendations and as you said, selfcare recommendations.

Ballard: Now, you mentioned that there's a vaccine for this. My question to you in that is what age should you get this vaccine?

Finan: It starts at the age of nine. So they recommend that boys and girls get it. And believe it or not, unlike the COVID vaccine, the HPV vaccine has almost 100% protection rate. Almost 100% protection against getting cancer. And it's really a cancer vaccine. It's the only cancer that we can prevent with a vaccine. You think about the literally dozens of cancers, if not hundreds, that people can get all over their body. It's the only one that we can prevent with a vaccine. And that vaccine has about 100% protection. So starting at the age of nine, you can get it all the way up to the age of 45—so you would not be eligible. *laughs* Just kidding.

Ballard: I was about to say, Dr. Finan, I hope I don't look too much older, do I?

Finan: You don't look a day over 44.

Ballard: Well, you know, look I love it. This information is something that I know now I can go out and pass on to others. And I hope all the listeners are doing this because, you know, if we can check something off the box that won't come back and harm us, then it's just literally up to us to make the appointment and just go ahead and get it off the table.

Finan: I tell you, it's so sad for me when I see a patient who's, let's say 30 years old. I just had a patient who I put on hospice who is in her thirties. She was eligible for the vaccine but for some reason,

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didn't get it. And I generally don't harp on that when I'm seeing someone who has an advanced cancer. But this poor young lady had children, of course, and she's going to die from cervical cancer, from a cancer that's preventable. Very, very sad case, and I see it all the time, unfortunately. But what I do try to do with those patients is say you can save lives. Get your children vaccinated. Talk to your friends. Get them to have their children vaccinated. Talk to your friends who have finished having their children and ask them to go get a pap smear. Because again, that's a group of women that's not going to the doctor anymore. They're busy. They've got kids. They're running around with their job and taking care of their family. And people just get busy and they put off their own healthcare. They put off themselves.

Ballard: And that's why we have this podcast to remind people that healthcare is selfcare. And, you know, we appreciate you just coming in and sharing with us about this amazing topic that we can overcome. That medicine has given us the victory over. We just got to be proactive and use it.

Finan: Right. And unfortunately, you know, when the vaccine first came out, there were some groups that really pushed against it. And similar to the COVID vaccine, I mean, there's a lot of similarities with opposition, vaccine hesitancy. And the groups that pushed against it were afraid that if their kids got the vaccine, they would rush out and have sex.

And there's actually data. They've actually studied that. And the sexual activity rate is identical in vaccinated versus unvaccinated teenagers. But unfortunately, when the vaccine came out, there was so much opposition because of that issue--it's sort of a hot button issue--that it was not made part of the routine vaccine series. You know, when you take your kid to the pediatrician, "you can you came in for the vaccines. I'll see you in two years for the next" series.

Ballard: Ok.

Finan: There's no question that you're going to get your kid vaccinated but this vaccine was not added to it, nor was it added to the required vaccines to attend school. So because of that, the vaccination rates vary across the country, but in some areas it's as low as 35%, which is really sad because these are deadly cancers that people are actually dying from and they're absolutely preventable.

Ballard: So once again, I want to keep hammering this home. You make an appointment. Now, is this an appointment you can make with your primary care provider?

Finan: Yes. And actually, you can get the vaccine at a pharmacy. Or many grocery stores in their pharmacies, they carry the HPV vaccine. So, you don't even need to see a doctor for the vaccine. But certainly when you're taking your kids for their vaccination series when they're nine to eleven, get them vaccinated. I have boy-girl twins who are 24. And I had them vaccinated when they were roughly that age.

Ballard: There you go. I'm going to make sure my kids are covered.

Finan: Absolutely.

Ballard: Make sure my whole family is covered, to be honest with you. Now, Dr. Finan, this is where I shift a little bit. So I know you're one of my favorite people, so we're going to dig a little deep into who you are as a person. What are you currently listening to musically? Or audio book wise?

Finan: Well, my favorite audio book that I listened to recently is called A Gentleman in Moscow. It was really interesting. I forget the author's name, unfortunately, but it was A Gentleman in Moscow. Another audio book that I listened to that I really enjoyed was called Just Mercy, and that was by an attorney who was from the East Coast, finished law school, moved to Alabama, and served much of his career defending people

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on death row in Alabama who were sent to prison without cause. You know, innocent people who are sitting on death row waiting to be executed. And he's dedicated his career to defending them. And it's an unbelievable book. I think it was made into a movie.

Ballard: It was Michael B. Jordan. You know, I'm a film guy!

Finan: Yeah. Well, the nice thing about the book is it's read by the author. And it's an incredible listen. And as far as music, I listen to classic rock. I was in a rock and roll band when I was younger.

Ballard: What was the name of the band?

Finan: Well, there were several, but the most infamous were there were two that were the most infamous. You know, "Ya Ma's Band". For those of you who are not from the South, that's your mama. *laughs* And we played classic rock. And then I was in a little jazz combo that we marched in Mardi Gras in New Orleans. And we called ourselves the "Mystical Moons of Uranus". *laughs* That's the planet, by the way.

Ballard: Oh, my goodness. What instrument?

Finan: I played guitar in both. Yeah. In the "Mystical Moons of Uranus" and "Ya Ma's Band". Yeah. So believe it or not, we had a brief moment of fame in the "Mystical Moons of Uranus". We were stopped by MTV. At the time, MTV was big into music videos before it went into all this other stuff, but it was pure music videos. And they were covering Mardi Gras, and they stopped us at the corner and filmed us for like probably 15 seconds.

Ballard: That's cool. Now, I got to ask you one more question. At the end of the day, when you're done from work, what is your routine? What are you doing?

Finan: Well, I go home to my family. My wife Melinda and my twins—my twins still live at home, Noah and Tatyana. And actually we adopted them from Russia. I don't know if you knew that.

Ballard: I didn't.

Finan: Yeah. We could have come back with the little nesting dolls, and we thought, heck, why not come back with twins? You know. *laughs* So I go home and have some family time. In fact, my daughter and I played a game last night called Rummikub, which is it's like a—

Ballard: My kids and I play it.

Finan: Yeah, it's a fun number game. Yeah.

Ballard: Great way to spend time.

Finan: I think it's derived from gin rummy. But my favorite thing to do, pastime wise, is just do things around the house. I literally go to Lowe's or Home Depot two or three times a week. I just love building stuff, fixing stuff, just doing stuff around the house, in the yard.

Ballard: There you go now, Doctor Finan, before I let you out of here, I got to ask, where can people get in touch with you? If they heard something today that they will like for you to do some screenings or anything else?

Finan: Yeah, absolutely. Through Singing River Health System, they have a website. If you just Google Singing River Health System, there's a way to get a message to me. But also through Facebook, I don't have a personal page or any kind of social media--old school I guess. I'm 62 and that stuff scares me.

Ballard: Well, thankfully you have people like us in marketing who make sure people know you're out here right doing an amazing job.

Finan: So you can look for me through the social media of Singing River Health System. Absolutely.

Ballard: Absolutely. I appreciate you coming on this episode and I hope to have you back soon.

Finan: I would love it. Thank you.