We are becoming accustomed to reading recommendations on human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine performance; from the initial observations where the monovalent HPV 16 vaccine prevented vaccine-type infection, to the high prophylactic efficacy that was demonstrated in the various clinical trials of the bivalent and quadrivalent vaccines. Justification for the introduction of costly HPV immunisation programmes has been predicated, heavily, on the reduction of high-grade cervical lesions (as a surrogate for cancer); however, there is clearly more to HPV-related disease and, indeed, cervical disease management than high-grade cervical lesions.

As a consequence, this article reports on a combined analysis of two quadrivalent vaccine placebo-controlled efficacy trials, where efficacy for the reduction of low-grade cervical lesions (as a surrogate for cervical intraepithelial neoplasia and anogenital warts: randomised controlled trial. FUTURE II Study Group, Dilnitzer J, Kjaer SK, Wheeler CM, Smidt H, Gold EB, Jørgensen K, Iversen OE, Hernandez-Avila M, et al. BMJ 2010; 341: c3493


The novel opens in 1942 in a San Francisco torn apart by wartime activity and gives hints of earlier personal failures, before shifting back to Margaret’s formative years growing up in the Midwest during the 1880s. Although a popular device, it was irritating to know the ending before the rest of the story, which is otherwise told in chronological order, with the dates heading up each chapter. The historical events occurring in the background during sixty years are only lightly drawn. Like most of the events in Margaret’s life, they flow around her, increasing her bewilderment and helplessness. The civil war provides the backdrop to Margaret’s early years. A self-contained child, she seems outwardly little affected by being taken to see a public hanging, although it becomes apparent (much) later that the memories were suppressed. Further traumatic events include the death of her two older brothers and the suicide of her father, which leaves Margaret vulnerable and released by the death of her husband, and moves with her daughters to her father’s farm. There the daughters are brought up to be wives and mothers. In a lengthy middle section of the novel, in which the younger daughters grow up and marry, Jane Smiley captures the rural unhurried life. Margaret reads classics, sews, takes long walks, and makes jams and cordials. Her first bicycle ride is a revelation; a glimpse into a freer, faster, more dangerous life.

Finally, at 27 and almost despairing, Margaret marries Andrew Dorn, age 34, an astronomer who has returned to his home town under a cloud of scandal. Andrew is odd and aloof, but at least he’s interesting, and he immediately bears her off to faraway California, where he has a position at a naval observatory near San Francisco.


We want to remind journal readers that if they would like to offer to review an appropriate fiction title of their own choosing then they should contact the Journal Editorial Office by e-mail (journal@fsh.org) in the first instance with details of their nominated title.