

Medical Quackery on Anti-Vaccine Web Sites

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A recent JAMA article attempts to suggest that many web sites that oppose childhood vaccinations appeal to readers' emotions when trying to convey their message, and include claims about vaccination that are not supported by studies from peer-reviewed medical journals.

In order to evaluate how anti-vaccination Web sites present information, and what type of information they present, Dr. Wolfe and his team surveyed 22 Web sites that contained information that appeared to oppose vaccination.

The investigators found that all of the evaluated Web sites said that vaccines cause illnesses that appear to have no cause and arise spontaneously. Most sites also claimed that vaccines weaken a child's immune system. In addition, 95% of the Web sites said that side effects from vaccines are underreported, and another 64% contained information for parents about how they can avoid immunizing a child, such as by seeking a philosophical exemption.

In addition, Wolfe and his colleagues found that 55% of the Web sites included personal stories of parents who suspect that their child was hurt or killed as a result of vaccination, and another one quarter of the sites had pictures of the injured children.

[JAMA June 26, 2002;287:3245-3248](#)

DR. MERCOLA'S COMMENT:

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I will allow one of the country's leading anti-vaccine advocates, and one of my personal heroes, to expand on this amazing story. I have listed the sites that were reviewed after her comment. My site was not included as the research for the article was done two years ago and the search engines they used at the time did not rate my site high enough. Of course that would be far different today as the site is the number one traffic ranked site of all the anti-vaccine sites.

COMMENT FROM BARBARA LOE FISHER

Barbara Loe Fisher is the Co-founder and President [National Vaccine Information Center](#).

In the latest efforts by anti-science activists to label pro-vaccine safety advocates "anti-vaccine," a trio from Northwestern University have published an article in the June 26, 2002 Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) entitled "Content and Design Attributes of Antivaccination Web Sites."

In what must surely be a lull in the careers of Robert M. Wolfe, M.D., Lisa K. Sharp, Ph.D., and Martin S. Lipsky, M.D., these three have spent a lot of time and effort pouring over the content of what they have dubbed "antivaccination" websites in order to come up with an analysis purporting to get to the heart of the thinking and motives behind organizations and individuals who operate websites questioning the safety and efficacy of vaccines.

The [National Vaccine Information Center \(NVIC\)](#) which operates the oldest and largest vaccine safety advocacy website, offers the following observations about the content of the article and the thinking and motives of its authors:

1. This is not science, it is an op ed piece.

2. The information on the Internet, thank goodness, is not peer reviewed by doctors like these authors or we wouldn't be able to believe what is on the Internet anymore than we are able to believe what is published in JAMA.

3. They need to include a dictionary in their article. What exactly is their definition of "antivaccination?" Is it the label they apply in the second sentence of the first paragraph to those challenging "the safety and effectiveness of recommended vaccines?" If that is the definition of anti-vaccine, we can label these authors anti-science for suggesting that challenging and testing existing knowledge in science be abolished in favor of protecting the status quo.

4. The hallmark of good science is replication. We call for a public release of the names of all the websites these authors have labeled anti-vaccine so their analysis can be independently analyzed.

5. In just one of the many examples of intellectual bias, the authors perseverate about the Internet access the public has to personal and emotional experiences of families with vaccine injured children. They, however, apparently have no problem with the use of visual images of children who were injured or died from polio as an incentive to the public to get vaccinated.

6. This article is a sophomoric attempt to label the vaccine safety and informed consent movement as "anti-vaccine" in order to deflect attention from the very real gaps in scientific knowledge about the biological mechanisms of adverse responses to vaccination. Should the Institute of Medicine be labeled anti-vaccine for repeatedly publishing reports over the past decade calling for increased scientific research into outstanding questions about vaccine safety?

Instead of analyzing websites which are pointing out and asking for answers to outstanding scientific questions about vaccine safety, these doctors should be pulling their microscopes out of storage and finding out why some children are not able to handle the 36 doses of 11 vaccines they are now getting.

They could work to develop genetic and other biomarkers to identify and screen out high risk children. That would go a long way toward re-instilling trust in national vaccine policies and eliminating some of the nagging doubts about vaccines that parents of learning disabled, hyperactive, epileptic, autistic, asthmatic, diabetic and mentally retarded children talk about on the internet.

7. History shows that challenge to the status quo, which is embodied in much of the free speech that is taking place on the internet, is a first necessary step to meaningful reform of powerful institutions. We proudly stand by the content of our website at www.909shot.com which details our 20 year public record of working to institute vaccine safety and informed consent protections in the mass vaccination system, including playing a major role in obtaining a safer pertussis vaccine for American babies licensed in 1996. We will stand by that accomplishment any day even if we haven't published peer-reviewed articles in JAMA.

Finally, this kind of pretentious posturing by doctors who claim that they engaged in "critical revision of the manuscript for important intellectual content" did not remove the responsibility from JAMA editors to exercise a little self discipline and pass on this one.

What the publishing of this kind of junk science does is fuel the suspicions of parents that those in power are determined to silence the voices of people suffering because science will not listen and does not care. It is a sad commentary on an even sadder reality that faces many families with vaccine-injured children.

Related Articles:

[Dr. Mercola's Favorite Vaccine Links](#)

1 Australian Vaccination Network, Australia,
<http://www.avn.org.au/>

2 Center for Complex Infectious Disease, USA,
<http://www.ccid.org/safety.htm#>

3 Center for Empirical Medicine, USA,
<http://www.empiricaltherapies.com/index.html>

4 French National League for Liberty in Vaccination, France
<http://www.ctanet.fr/vaccination-information/in/index.htm>

5 Gary Null's Natural Living site, USA,
<http://www.garynull.com/issues/Vaccines/VaccinationActionFile.htm>

6 Global Vaccine Awareness League, USA,
<http://www.gval.com/>

7 HealthWorld Online, USA,
<http://www.healthy.net/vaccine/>

8 Immunisation Awareness Society, New Zealand,
<http://www.ias.org.nz/ias.htm>

9 Citizens for Healthcare Freedom, USA,
<http://www.unc.edu/~aphillip/www/vaccine/informed.htm>

10 Leading Edge Research Group, USA,
<http://www.trifax.org/menu/bio.html>

11 National Vaccine Information Center, USA,
<http://www.909shot.com/>

12 NVIC - UK, UK,
<http://www.van.org.uk/>

13 ThinkTwice Global Vaccine Institute, USA,
<http://www.new-atlantean.com/global/vaccine.html>

14 NIIN: Natural Immunity Information Network, NY, USA,
<http://goodlight.net/nyvic/>

15 P.A.V.E. - People Advocating Vaccine Education, USA,
<http://www.vaccines.bizland.com>

16 PROVE: Parents Requesting Open Vaccine Education, USA,
<http://vaccineinfo.net/>

17 Vaccine Safety Website, USA,
<http://vaccines.net/>

18 Shirley's Wellness Café, USA,
<http://www.shirleys-wellness-cafe.com/>

19 WHALE Vaccine site, UK,
<http://whale.to/vaccines.html>

20 Well Within / Nevada, USA,
<http://nccn.net/~wwithin/vaccine.htm>

21 Missouri Citizens Coalition for Freedom in Health Care, USA,
http://members.aol.com/_ht_a/mccfhc/index.htm

22 Campaign Against Fraudulent Medical Research, Australia