



Battle of the Experts

Student Handout #2: **Vaccinations: The Overlooked Factors**

By Bernard Rimland, Ph.D

Vaccinations, like motherhood and apple pie, have long been regarded as taboo topics, beyond criticism. No more. The publication in *The Lancet* of the article by Andrew Wakefield and associates, providing a well-documented mechanism for the long suspected role of MMR vaccines in causing autism, has raised an international furor.

I began to suspect a link between the DPT vaccination and autism as early as in the mid 1960s, based on letters from and interviews with many parents. Our Form E-3 parent questionnaire, dating from 1967, asked parents about their children's reaction to the DPT shot. H. L. Coulter and B. L. Fisher state, in their excellent book, *DPT: Shot in the Dark* (1985), "The phenomenon of early infantile autism was first observed and discussed by physicians in the early 1940s, a few years after the pertussis vaccine became more widely used in the United States.... The parallel to certain areas of pertussis vaccine damage is striking" (p. 123).

Readers of the *Autism Research Review International (ARRI)* are well aware of the autism-vaccine controversy (see *ARRI* 10/4, 10/1, 9/3, 9/2, 9/1, 6/3), but until now the mass media have been kept largely in the dark. In Britain, where there has been an epidemic of autism, with hundreds of families registering for projected class-action law suits, some newspapers have been devoting half-page or larger articles to the controversy.

Dr. Wakefield and his courageous collaborators have endured a torrent of criticism and abuse from those dedicated to silencing anyone challenging the sacred-cow status of vaccines. The fact is, vaccines are not nearly as safe, nor anywhere near as effective, as vaccination proponents claim.

Dr. Wakefield's opponents argue, quite speciously, that he is confusing association with causation, and that the autism link may be merely "coincidental."

I find it doubly ironic that the vaccine advocates accuse Wakefield of this elementary error in logic. That very argument was used just as wrongly--*against* vaccinations--by the opponents of Edward Jenner when he introduced vaccination to Europe. (It was used earlier in Asia.) Jenner's observation that milkmaids exposed to pox-infected cows developed a resistance to smallpox was attributed to coincidence. Fortunately for

today's vaccine proponents, Jenner's critics did not succeed in dismissing his observations as merely "coincidence."

The second irony is that the critics who accuse Dr. Wakefield of confusing association with causation are guilty of doing that very thing--deliberately, not mistakenly--while trying to influence public policy, by claiming that vaccines cause steep declines in the incidence of disease when there is good evidence that the decline was often due to other factors – that is, to *coincidence*.

In their reply to Wakefield's article, "Vaccine adverse effects: causal or coincidental?," R.T. Chen and F. DeStephano (*Lancet* 2/28/98) present a table implying that the incidence of a number of diseases was enormously reduced by vaccinations. In fact, judging from data presented by Neil Z. Miller in his book *Vaccines, Are They Safe and Effective?*, the reductions Chen and DeStephano cite are often coincidental rather than causal. In the case of measles, the death rate did drop precipitously over a period of four decades, but the death rate fell 95% *before* the measles vaccine was introduced! In the case of polio, the death rate had dropped 60% from its peak in the 1920s and '30s *before* the vaccines arrived in the 1950s. There is considerable evidence that the claims of benefit for other vaccines (e.g., pertussis, tetanus) are also greatly inflated.

There is an enormous amount of credible evidence that vaccines can and do cause harm. In response to what was seen as a cause-and-effect relationship with sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), the Japanese government, in 1979, ordered the postponement of routine DPT shots until after the age of two. "SIDS has virtually disappeared from Japan (Neil Z. Miller, *Immunization, Theory vs. Reality* (1996).) In an article titled, "The Dark Side of Immunizations?," *Science News* (November 22, 1997) reported findings by scientists implicating the rise in diabetes and asthma to vaccines, and these allegations are just the tip of a very large iceberg. (The medical establishment's ferocious defense of vaccines as irrefutably safe and beneficial somehow reminds me of the *Titanic*.)

I am not saying that vaccinations are without value. I am saying that their benefits have been overstated, and their dangers dismissed much too carelessly.

Source: *Autism Research Review International*, 1998, Vol. 12, No. 1, page 3
http://www.autism.com/ari/editorials/ed_vaccinations.htm

About the author:

The founder of the Autism Research Institute (ARI), Bernard Rimland, Ph.D., was an internationally recognized authority on autism and the father of an autistic son. Dr. Rimland wrote the prize-winning book *Infantile Autism*, and was the founder of the Autism Society of America. He served as chief technical advisor on the film *Rain Man* and earned many awards for his work during his lifetime.