

Right on autism

The American Academy of Pediatrics, Hawaii Chapter would like to thank Bob Jones for his excellent column "Vaccines and Autism." We think his points were right on target, very much to the point and very reflective of the concerns that we pediatricians have about the misinformation circulating in our community. We appreciate his rational thoughts in this emotionally charged arena.

Galen Chock MD

President, Hawaii Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

No 'bad science'

Thank you to Bob Jones for his well-written column in *MidWeek* regarding vaccines and autism. I appreciate his appropriate and balanced comments in discussing this unfortunately controversial issue. Too often anecdotal reports of "bad science," as he put it, are held equal to a much larger body of legitimate scientific information, which make my job as pediatrician and physician much more difficult. I appreciate and value your ability to articulate what I am not able to. Thank you again, and keep up your good work.

Keith T. Matsumoto, MD

Past President, American Academy of Pediatrics-Hawaii Chapter

Bad vaccines

I read Bob Jones' column "Vaccines and Autism" with great disappointment. There are a number of statements that are wrong or give a misleading impression.

Autism is not just "an illness du jour." Autism affects one in 150 children (CDC), an increase of 20 to 60 times the rate in the '70s. Studies have shown that the increase is real, not just better diagnosis, changed criteria or diagnostic substitution. While it seems reasonable that some of the increase could be better awareness, that would not account for such a huge increase.

Autism is the fastest-growing developmental disability, and more common than childhood diabetes and cancer combined. It deserves our best efforts to find solutions. Current research funding is a fraction of that of other diseases, and focuses on genetics (yielding very little) rather than treatments, prevention, or cause.

Mr. Jones wrote, "If you read all the science evidence, and not just what suits your bias, you'll find there's nothing worthy ..." I could not disagree with you more.

I am familiar with many of the studies, both supporting and not supporting the idea that mercury in vaccines could trigger autism. Many studies that are cited to prove there is no link do not support that claim in their data, and many have authors with conflicts of interest. On the other hand, there are many studies of the biology of individuals with autism, showing higher levels of mercury and an impaired ability to detoxify.

One important study found that monkeys injected with mercury similar to what's in the flu vaccine ended up with more mercury in their brain than monkeys who ate a similar dose, as found in fish. (Most flu vaccines contain 25mcg of mercury, but some are available without mercury.)

A recent study claimed that autism rates continued to increase in California even after mercury was removed from most childhood vaccines. But they did not account for increased use of the flu vaccine, and they did not control for total exposure to mercury. (Two studies now show higher rates of autism near sources of mercury air pollution.)

Until we are certain what has caused the incredible increase in autism, we should not be taking chances with mercury.

Don King

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