

Autism and vaccines: The supposed link was faked

By ACSH Staff — January 6, 2011

Yesterday the world learned that Dr. Andrew Wakefield is a fraud. *British Medical Journal* released the results of its [investigation](#) [1] documenting the premeditation of Wakefield and his lawyer as co-conspirators who were attempting to extort compensation from vaccine makers. The investigators found that Dr. Wakefield concocted his findings to aid his attorney-partner's lawsuits. He was paid \$675,000 for this.

The exposure of Dr. Wakefield's fakery is good news for the cause of public health, and ACSH is gratified that accounts of his deceptions are being prominently featured in mainstream media outlets like the *Today Show* and *Good Morning America*.

Back in 1998, a paper by Dr. Wakefield appeared in *The Lancet* claiming that autism had been caused by childhood vaccination with the MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccine. Dr. Wakefield's research soon attracted the support of thousands of people, including a number of Hollywood celebrities and quite a few science reporters. The hysteria about the alleged dangers of vaccines took hold, and many parents refused to have their children vaccinated, especially in the UK.

In the ensuing years, researchers intent on reproducing his study found that they could not come up with the same results. Then last year, *The Lancet* formally disavowed his article, and Dr. Wakefield's medical license was revoked by British authorities.

Yet the damage has been done. In the United Kingdom, four children died because of a needless outbreak of measles that followed directly on plummeting rates of vaccination, notes ACSH trustee, vaccine researcher and leading pediatrician Dr. Paul Offit.

ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross observes: "No matter what Dr. Wakefield's motives were, the significance from the point of view of public health is the same: there never was any link between vaccines and autism. I hold *The Lancet* and its editor-in-chief, Robert Horton, responsible to some degree for his ill-considered decision to publish Wakefield's bogus study."

Last February ACSH's Dr. Elizabeth Whelan made this same point in the pages of the *New York Post*, commenting, "[M]ore than 1,000 children have died from H1N1 flu over the last year — numbers that would surely be smaller had not so many parents been frightened away from getting flu shots by the general Wakefield-induced paranoia over vaccines. In other words, a medical journal triggered a chain of events that led to preventable disease — and some child deaths."

Still, correcting the record is important. As Dr. Ross points out, even now Wakefield's website has thousands of devoted adherents.

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