Doctor knows best and should tell parents so

By ACSH Staff — November 29, 2011

Speaking of getting your children vaccinated on schedule, a disconcerting trend in some pediatric practices has been reported in a new study: Over half of pediatricians surveyed report that they are willing to alter a child’s immunization schedule at a parent’s request.

For the purpose of their study, reported in Pediatrics, researchers surveyed pediatricians in the state of Washington about their vaccination practices. Of the pediatricians who responded, 77 percent reported that they sometimes or frequently had to deal with parents who requested changes to their children’s immunization schedules. But how in the world do the parents know what vaccination schedule is the best? ACSH’s Dr. Elizabeth Whelan wonders.

What is even more troubling is that a majority of pediatricians 61 percent said that they would accommodate a parent’s request to change a vaccination schedule. The numbers differed depending on which vaccine was considered: Only around 40 percent said they would make changes to the schedules for the Haemophilus influenzae type B (Hib) vaccine, the pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV), or the diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis vaccine (DTaP). And for these three vaccines, very few pediatricians would allow delays of more than four months. But over 75 percent of pediatricians would accommodate schedule change requests for the administration of hepatitis B, varicella, and polio vaccines and many would permit delays of more than four months.

ACSH’s Dr. Gilbert Ross, concerned about the ability of parents to adequately assess the numerous scares about children’s vaccines without any medical training, observes that superstitions about vaccines, entirely unfounded by science, are all over TV and other media. So it is understandable, he says, that parents would see these claims and be concerned by this misinformation, which is often promoted as based on studies that have been suppressed by some mysterious conspiracy. What is not acceptable, he continues, is that pediatricians would accommodate this. There are real dangers to children not receiving their vaccinations on the recommended schedule.