

If the facts don't fit, you must acquit

By ACSH Staff — January 9, 2012

Andrew Wakefield, the original architect of the phony autism-vaccine scare, has had the chutzpah to [file a defamation suit](#) ^[1] against the journal *BMJ*, its editor, and a journalist for printing a scathing series of articles last January that attacked him for the ethical flaws in his retracted paper.

In fact, the journal and the writer didn't stop at that accusation. After comparing Wakefield's own documents with the published study, they discovered discrepancies between Wakefield's results and the actual medical histories of the children involved, that bordered on fraud. The articles also suggested that Wakefield deliberately altered facts about the patients' records in order to support his conclusion, additionally noting that he had financial ties to lawyers aiming to sue vaccine producers.

Back in 1998, Wakefield published a study in *The Lancet* claiming the childhood MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella) vaccination caused symptoms of autism in 12 children. Although those versed in the scientific method roundly criticized the obvious flaws in the study when it first appeared, *The Lancet's* editor, Dr. Richard Horton, justified its publication as a stimulant for debate. Although the co-authors denounced the study when they learned the facts of Wakefield's manipulations and ethical lapses, it took *The Lancet* until 2010 to officially retract this flawed study.

In the meantime, the *Lancet* publication, and the publicity surrounding it, frightened parents in Britain and around the world about vaccinating their children. This fear of vaccination quickly spread, and led to outbreaks of measles and other vaccine-preventable diseases. ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross places much of the blame for these resulting issues on the failure of *The Lancet* to promptly reject the faulty publication, noting that Horton has never accepted responsibility for the havoc this publication wreaked.

There's no question that Wakefield's conclusions were baseless and that he committed a serious offense in fabricating the results of his vaccine-autism research, says Dr. Ross. He studied children without first obtaining parental consent, which is obviously highly unethical, and then he went on to manipulate that data for the study. The articles in *BMJ* also found evidence that he had colluded with lawyers with the aim of suing manufacturers of vaccines which goes beyond unprofessional and unethical behavior.

Dr. Ross adds that Wakefield is most unlikely to win his defamation suit. Although it is now much too late for the many children sickened or killed by vaccine-preventable contagions, parents will now know (perhaps with help from this suit) that his so-called research was phony from the start. His attempt to disprove the *BMJ's* assertions will not succeed.

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[1] <http://www.medpagetoday.com/InfectiousDisease/Vaccines/30522>