Docs turn up the heat on parents to vaccinate their kids

By ACSH Staff — March 13, 2012

While scientists around the world advocate for adult and childhood immunizations to counter the spread of vaccine-preventable diseases, many pediatricians are also doing their part to discourage parents from refusing to vaccinate their children.

An article yesterday in USA Today provides an excellent description of the steps some pediatricians are taking to improve compliance with the recommended vaccine schedules not only to help their patients stay healthy, but also to maintain a safe environment in their practices so that children will not be exposed to potentially dangerous communicable diseases from unvaccinated children.

Some of the measures pediatricians take to encourage parents to accept vaccinations include counseling them on the benefits and extremely low risks of vaccines, making parents sign a waiver if they bring a child in who is not vaccinated, or even refusing to accept patients who have not received their vaccinations.

The article also highlights the potentially devastating consequences of avoiding vaccines. For instance, one pediatrician's two-week-old infant became severely ill with whooping cough and needed to be put in an intensive care unit because she treated a patient who had this disease while she was pregnant.

This story is truly illustrative of the problematic situation in this country regarding vaccinations and vividly demonstrates two of our main messages, comments ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross. One is that adults and teens need to be sure to get booster shots for whooping cough, not just to protect themselves, but also to keep little ones safe, since they are particularly susceptible to the disease. Second, pediatricians need to be firm with parents who refuse to vaccinate their children. Even if physicians don't simply refuse to see these families, they should certainly counsel them and discourage such superstitious and dangerous fears.

Yet some parents are still foregoing vaccines out of concern that they can overload a child's immune system and cause autism. ACSH's Dr. Elizabeth Whelan points out that there is no scientific basis for this argument. Children's immune systems are bombarded with antigens all the time, at levels far higher than what exists in vaccines. Their immune systems are not overloaded. Much of this misinformation originated in a phony study done in 1998 by Andrew Wakefield. While debunked and discredited, its effects linger on.