We at ACSH give a huge shoutout to Dr. Kristen Feemster, a pediatric infectious disease specialist at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, and colleague of ACSH trustee Dr. Paul Offit.

In her recent op-ed in The New York Times [1], Dr. Feemster argues that there should be no exemptions from vaccinations for personal or religious reasons.

She says, At the crux of this question is whether individual choice can be subverted for public good. Vaccines work by protecting individuals, but their strength really lies in the ability to protect one's neighbors. When there are not enough people within a community who are immunized, we are all at risk.

This is especially important because there are some people usually those with compromised immune systems who cannot be vaccinated. These people must rely on herd immunity the decrease in prevalence (and thus transmission) of infectious diseases resulting from vaccination of the remaining population.

What is behind the resistance to vaccination? Dr. Feemster says, We are fortunate to live in an era when we rarely see many vaccine-preventable diseases -- the risk of these diseases seems minimal while the perceived risk of vaccination becomes larger. This is compounded by the proliferation of misinformation, readily available from the news media and other sources.

ACSH's Dr. Josh Bloom could not agree more. In his February 4, 2013 in-print debate [2] in U.S. News and World Report, he argues that all healthcare workers should be required to get annual flu vaccines.
He says, In a perfect world, this mandate should not require government intervention. But if certain hospitals are unwilling and unable to enforce this simple rule, then patients should be informed, so they may go elsewhere if they choose. If government regulation is indeed required, then it is a price worth paying. Some seeking exemption will argue that their religious beliefs prohibit vaccination and use this to avoid the shot. I view this as a cop-out. A religious nurse with the flu is just as dangerous as an infected atheist.

ACSH s Dr. Gil Ross added, In fact, inspired by the work of Drs. Feemster and Offit, ACSH urged the New York City public hospital authorities to make flu vaccination mandatory for its healthcare workers last summer, but we got nowhere, and we were referred to the N.Y.State public health officials. We shall renew that effort as soon as the vaccination success rate for the past season becomes available, which we believe will confirm the abysmally low rate, exposing patients to needless contagion.

Let s give a round of applause to Dr. Feemster for her very important editorial.