

Original thread starting from Brian Deer's comments to Dr Fouad Yazbak:

http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/340/feb02_4/c644

Dr Yazbak's claims

8 March 2010

Brian Deer,
Journalist
London E1 9XW

I am very concerned by the e-letter from Dr Edward Yazbak, a retired paediatrician of Falmouth, Massachusetts, claiming to be a grandparent of a child enrolled in the Wakefield Lancet study of February 1998. With this apparent credential, he lauded praise upon Wakefield, as he has done at public meetings which they have addressed together.

Send response to journal:
Re: Dr Yazbak's claims

I know the names and family backgrounds of all 12 of the children enrolled in the study, including the child enrolled from the United States. I don't believe that Dr Yazbak has a family relationship with any of them.

If what Dr Yazbak ought to have said was that a grandchild of his received clinical care at the Royal Free at some time subsequent to February 1997, then it's an additional concern that he should indicate, as he did, a belief that the boy was taking part in a study. He might clarify the position, and also indicate what service the north London hospital offered to his grandson that was not available in New England. The Royal Free had no department or reputation for evaluating developmental disorders, and ileocolonoscopy, if indicated, would have been available on his doorstep. As the GMC has made clear, Dr Wakefield had a non-clinical research contract, and so it's not clear what service he could have offered any child.

Dr Yazbak's claims have been widely disseminated on anti-vaccine websites, as something accorded the additional credibility of being apparently published at a BMJ site.

Competing interests: My investigation of Wakefield led to the GMC hearing and the Lancet's retraction

The goodness of medical scientists

8 March 2010

Mark Struthers,
GP and prison doctor
Bedfordshire, UK

"Neurotoxicology. 2009 Oct 2. [Epub ahead of print] WITHDRAWN: Delayed acquisition of neonatal reflexes in newborn primates receiving a thimerosal-containing Hepatitis B vaccine: Influence of gestational age and birth weight." [1]

Send response to journal:
Re: The goodness of medical
scientists

The paper had cleared all those successive hurdles necessary for a paper to be published. The paper had passed eligibility screening, peer review and gained statistical, technical and editor's approval for publication in a prestigious international journal. It had been disseminated in electronic format and with the designation "in press", it stood in line for publication in the print version of 'Neurotoxicology'. On 12 February the paper was quietly withdrawn.

Was the topic area important and relevant to the 'Neurotoxicology' readership?

Yes. Questions have long been asked about the possible link between mercury in vaccines and neurodevelopment outcomes. Since vaccines containing the preservative thimerosal, (Th) including neonatal hepatitis B (HB) vaccine, continue to be used routinely in developing countries, continued safety testing is important, particularly for premature and low birth weight neonates. Exploration of the neurotoxicity of mercury containing vaccines would certainly have been appropriate for the readership of 'Neurotoxicology' and highly

relevant to a general medical readership, so long as it was scientifically robust.

In summary, the researchers concluded that their primate study provided "preliminary evidence of abnormal neurodevelopmental responses in male infant macaques receiving a single dose of Th-containing HB vaccine at birth and indicates that further investigation is merited." Birth weight and GA (gestational age) appeared to be important variables that predicated susceptibility. [2]

Having jumped all the hurdles to publication, one can only assume that the science was robust. Why then was the paper withdrawn? Can erasing this paper from the official record be a good thing for science? Could Professor Greenhalgh please explain?

[1] PubMed.gov. US National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health.
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19800915>.

[2] Accepted Manuscript. Title: Delayed Acquisition of Neonatal Reflexes in newborn Primates receiving a Thimerosal-containing Hepatitis B Vaccine: influence of gestational age and Birth weight. Authors: Laura Hewitson, Lisa A. Houser, Carol Stott, Gene Sackett, Jaime L. Tomko, David Atwood, Lisa Blue, E. Railey White, Andrew J. Wakefield.
<http://www.rescuepost.com/files/hewitson-et-al-09-primate-hbv-study.pdf>

Competing interests: None declared

Re: Brian Deer's claims

9 March 2010

Michael D Innis,
NA
NA

Editor

Send response to journal:
Re: Re: Brian Deer's claims

I, for one, am disgusted at the Lancet, GMC and Medical Profession who are apparently blind to the fact that Wakefield and his colleagues discovered raised methylmalonic acid in the MMR vaccine treated group.

The obvious conclusion is some ingredient of the vaccine, when given to a genetically susceptible child, causes Cobalamin deficiency with all the signs and symptoms of pervasive developmental disorder.

Stop vaccinating children until the offending ingredient is identified and removed. The lives of these children must be considered before the profits of Big Pharma

Michael Innis

Competing interests: As previously declared.

Brian Deer's viewing of medical files.

9 March 2010

Hilary Butler,
freelance journalist
home 2121 New Zealand.

Dear Sir,

Send response to journal:
Re: Brian Deer's viewing of
medical files.

There are several UK medical studies relating to vaccines where I suspect that the authors are up to no good, so I would like unrestrained access to all key documents to see if I can confirm my suspicions, but can't quite work out how to do this.

Could Brian Deer please let the BMJ know the means by which UK legislation allows free lance (or any other) journalists, to view original research files, and compare them with Royal

Free (or any other hospital or private practice) medical files of children with full identities available, all test results available, without parental consent; the studies' authors consent; privacy restraints or hospital ethics committee approval?

Could Brian Deer also let the BMJ know the means by which a freelance journalist initiates proceedings with the GMC? As he so graphically stated on Radio New Zealand, (1) such fraudulent behaviour is but the tip of medical fraud iceberg.

Sincerely,

Hilary Butler.

(1) http://www.radionz.co.nz/audio/national/ntn/2010/02/11/feature_guest_-_brian_deer

Competing interests: None declared

Response to Mr. Deer's remarks

9 March 2010

F. Edward YAZBAK,
Pediatrician
Falmouth, Massachusetts
02540

Mr. Deer is absolutely correct: My grandson was not one of the 12 children enrolled in the original Wakefield study that was published in the Lancet in February 1998. If he had been, I would have certainly mentioned that among my competing interests for the last 10 years. Had Mr. Deer written earlier, I would have made that clear.

Send response to journal:
Re: Response to Mr. Deer's
remarks

It almost seems that Mr. Deer is less upset about what I wrote than about the fact that some web site somewhere had picked it up. I certainly have no idea where my remarks were circulated and by whom and I have no control of that.

In any case: If anyone else misunderstood my statement (s), I sincerely apologize for the confusion. No deceit was ever intended!

I must say that I am troubled that Mr. Deer was able to obtain the names and family backgrounds of the 12 original study patients. I am also surprised that he finds it fair to censor my defense of Dr. Wakefield after he subjected him to public flagellation for so long. Maybe it is time for Mr. Deer to take a deep breath and relax.

From everything I have read, it seems clear that the accusatory claims related to pain, suffering and unwarranted risky investigations that were discussed in the last few years were not limited to those original twelve children. They certainly seemed to be about the many others who were later seen and "studied" for autistic enterocolitis at the Royal Free GI unit and whose cases were reported in subsequent publications and presentations. When I mentioned "all available parents and grandparents of the children..." I certainly had in mind those hundreds of parents and grandparents that were never interviewed by the GMC committee. Whether they were inside the hall or on the sidewalk, outside of London or outside of the United Kingdom, many of them would have been elated to testify. It is regrettable that they were not allowed to.

When we took our boy to the Royal Free, we wanted to find out what was wrong with him. We just could not see him suffer and cry all day anymore. It was our understanding that while many children with autism and GI problems were being treated at the unit, only few could be fully investigated because of a multitude of reasons. We were therefore most elated when my grandson was selected. That is what I meant when I mentioned the "study". We

still count our blessings that my daughter and her family were living in London at the time.

It is no secret that I have been and will always be a supporter of Dr. Wakefield. Yet, I would point out that I did not submit a single rapid response to the BMJ in nearly two years and that I did not criticize the GMC ethics hearings while they were going on. Dr. Wakefield's attackers on the other hand never hesitated to publish defamatory remarks about him throughout that same period of time.

Mr. Deer is fortunate not to have a child, a relative or a friend with regressive autism. We were not so lucky and when we were down and out, we received comfort and extra good care from three wonderful physicians who unfortunately are still being subjected to a living hell.

Competing interests: Grandfather of a boy with regressive autism

Patient Confidentiality

10 March 2010

John A. Dodge,
Hon. Professor of Child Health
University of Wales Swansea

Like Hilary Butler, I was surprised that the journalist Brian Deer apparently holds names and addresses of autistic patients, as well as the details of their clinical histories.

Send response to journal:
Re: Patient Confidentiality

As the former director of a national disease registry, I am well aware of the difficulty bona fide medical researchers often encounter, and of the great lengths to which hospitals and Trusts go to ensure confidentiality, and where possible anonymity, for patients before they will release any information, for fear of violating the Data Protection Act.

It is particularly surprising that a journalist for a lay newspaper under orders to find a big story (Mr Deer's own words) could persuade a respected teaching hospital to give him such data. Did the request go to the research ethics committee? Did he obtain written consent from the parents? Was he not given instructions to destroy all information which could possibly identify individuals as soon as he had extracted what he needed, in which case he should no longer hold names and addresses?

Remembering the threat of litigation if journalists should try to reveal the immunisation status of the child of the then Prime Minister, I can only conclude that Mr Deer either covered his back and went through the correct procedures, or else that he assumed that the parents would have no appetite, or money, to take him, his newspaper or the hospital Trust to court for violating their privacy. I await his clarification with interest.

Competing interests: Occasional frustration at inability to obtain information from medical records for epidemiological research

Grave concerns

10 March 2010

John Stone,
Contributing editor: Age of
Autism
London N22

I would just like to echo the concerns of Hilary Butler and Dr F Edward Yazbak that Brian Deer should have been allowed to access the confidential records of patients without permission and even received the support for his activities of senior members of the medical profession such as Prof Greenhalgh and Dr Evan Harris MP - a former member of the BMA Ethics Committee - not to mention NHS websites, and this journal.

Send response to journal:
Re: Grave concerns

I believe there should be a full investigation.

Competing interests: Autistic son

Re: Patient Confidentiality

12 March 2010

John Stone,
Contributing editor: Age of
Autism
London N22

Prof Dodge raises some interesting questions. It might be one kind of issue if Mr Deer had legal access to the documents and possibly misused them, but what if he did not have legal access? Would this still be a matter for the civil courts, or something else? I think we need clarification.

Send response to journal:
Re: Re: Patient
Confidentiality

Competing interests: Autistic son

Patient Confidentiality

12 March 2010

Bill Welsh,
President
Autism Treatment Trust.
Edinburgh EH3 7BJ

Professor Hodge, Hilary Butler and John Stone touch on probably the most alarming aspect of the already disturbing MMR debacle: The provision of the medical records of vulnerable children to a tabloid journalist.

Send response to journal:
Re: Patient Confidentiality

Unless 'medical ethics' is a one-way street applicable only to Dr Wakefield and his colleagues there was apparently a monumental breach of ethics at the Royal Free Hospital. One assumes a criminal investigation was instigated (with full police involvement) by Dr Ari Zuckerman and Dr Michael Pegg (senior witnesses against Dr Wakefield) because anything less would be totally unacceptable to the British public and one hopes to the medical community.

In today's pervert laden Britain there have been far too many examples of slipshod attention by medical supremos to the safety of children. Perhaps Ari Zuckerman or Michael Pegg would be kind enough to enlighten us regarding what action was taken.

But what about Richard Horton, Lancet Editor, surely he knew earlier than anybody that the journalist had obtained confidential records. Why did he personally not actuate a police enquiry?

The list of doctors who knew but were content to do nothing is becoming endless.

It would appear that the destruction of Dr Andrew Wakefield et al was paramount. Ethics, integrity, rectitude and even common sense lost out in the race to destroy the careers of three fine physicians.

Competing interests: Grandfather to an autistic boy.

Re: Re: Patient Confidentiality

13 March 2010

Joan Campbell,
Teacher
G64 3EU

I would also like to know how a journalist like Brian Deer is allowed to see children's medical records never mind having a list of the MMR/MR UK Group Litigation children whose legal aid was cruelly taken away.

Send response to journal:
Re: Re: Re: Patient
Confidentiality

I sent an open letter that was published in the Scottish Daily Mail to Tony Blair asking him did he give Leo his son the MMR and his secretary replied saying that the Prime Minister could not answer that question as Leo's medical files were confidential.

It is a crying shame the way children who were damaged by the MMR have never had their day in court. This is a total disgrace when the citizens of this country deserve the truth

regarding the MMR vaccine and why it is harming hundred of thousands of our children.

Competing interests: Mum of MMR vaccine damaged son

MMR Toxicity Explained

14 March 2010

Michael D Innis,
NA
NA

Editor,

Send response to journal:
Re: MMR Toxicity Explained

Joan Campbell says, and I agree with her, "it is a crying shame the way children who were damaged by the MMR vaccine have never had their day in court. This is a total disgrace when the citizens of this country deserve the truth regarding the MMR vaccine and why it is harming hundred of thousands of our children".

The truth is it is harming the children because as Wakefield and his colleagues have shown, some ingredient in the vaccine causes methymalonic acidaemia followed by cobalamin deficiency and consequently neurological lesions in genetically susceptible children.

The government is blind to this and one way out of this dilemma it seems is for doctors to forgo the five pieces of silver and refuse to vaccinate children on the grounds that the oath they have sworn, "first do no harm" forbids such an action.

Alternatively, appeal to the International Court of Justice.

Michael Innis

Competing interests: I have warned my family to beware of all vaccines.

Response to Brian Deer's comment

23 March 2010

Isabella Thomas,
Parent
BA5 2FG Wells

Send response to journal:
Re: Response to Brian Deer's
comment

Brian Deer had the names of the Lancet Children and dates they entered the Royal Free hospital on his web-sit for all to see long before the GMC hearing. His view was that some of us parent were in the media. The problem with that is that I did not tell the media that my boys were part of the Lancet study until Brian Deer let it be known. I have e-mailed him on numerous occasions asking him how he got hold of my children's medical notes without my permission. He has never interviewed me or my family and has not replied to this question. I believe Brian Deer got hold of confidential information on our children and want to know how this can happen. He told me in an e-mail that he managed to prise confidential documents from the Royal Free Hospital. This question below has not been answered by Brian Deer: Could Brian Deer also please let the BMJ know the means by which UK legislation allows free lance (or any other) journalists, to view original research files, and compare them with Royal Free (or any other hospital or private practice) medical files of children with full identities available, all test results available, without parental consent; the studies' authors consent; privacy restraints or hospital ethics committee approval?

Competing interests: Sons part of the Lancet study

The question of confidentiality in Brian Deer's reporting, Prof

23 March
2010

Greenhalgh and Dr Harris

John Stone,
Contributing editor: Age of
Autism
London N22

Send response to journal:
Re: The question of
confidentiality in Brian Deer's
reporting, Prof Greenhalgh
and Dr Harris

The question of confidentiality has often arisen in Brian Deer's reporting of the Wakefield/Lancet affair. It arose implicitly in the allegations he made about the referral of patients (which seem to me to be of no account) at the outset of this affair but which involved the complicity of responsible parties, if only by their silence on the matter. It arose when Deer published names of patients on his website (links supplied), it arose last year when he made claims in the Sunday Times about the medical status of the children in the Lancet study, which were unverifiable from published documents [1] and it has also arisen from his apparent access to legal documents on which he reports, for instance as here (some might think the rancorous tone inappropriate for a professional journalist):

"Call me old fashioned, but I think JABS should know better than to invoke poor Mrs xxxxx saying - presumably out of ignorance - that "legal aid was mysteriously taken away". There was no mystery, as Jackie surely knows. It followed the exchange of reports. In fact, having read them, I defy anyone with an IQ greater than their waist measurement to study those documents and not come to the conclusion that the Wakefield case was a bust. Even I was shocked - and I thought I was past that - by the calibre of much of the work. For the huge sums paid - in amounts I revealed last Christmas - the material for the children was, well, shocking."

This is a real question for the government and the medical profession, when the confidentiality of patient records are already a major political issue. It cannot be right - and this would be a striking example - for everyone to turn a blind eye because it was considered politically expedient (which is exactly why we need patient confidentiality). And it surely poses a particular problem to Prof Greenhalgh, who has contributed to Deer's site [3] and Dr Harris who accompanied Deer to the Lancet offices to make his accusations and subsequently led a House of Commons debate on the matter under the cloak of privilege [4]. People need to ponder this matter deeply, whatever their views on MMR and autism.

[1] Brian Deer, 'MMR doctor Andrew Wakefield fixed data on autism' Sunday Times, 8 February 2009 http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/health/article5683671.ece

[2] Brian Deer, 'The Cruelty of JABS', 3 June 2007, <http://web.archive.org/web/20070717061423/http://briandeer.com/wakefield/jabs-cruelty.htm>

[3] Professor Trisha Greenhalgh. Analysis of Wakefield MMR study asks why flaws weren't spotted by Lancet editors. April 2004. <http://briandeer.com/mmr/lancet-greenhalgh.htm>

[4] John Stone, 'Kafka Dreamt it II', 14 December 2004, BMJ Rapid Responses, <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/329/7477/1293#88915>

Competing interests: Autistic son