Research Report

Leiden Model United Nations 2017
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Forum: *World Health Assembly*
Issue: *Compulsory preventive vaccination of children*

Position: *Deputy Chair*

Introduction

There are a lot of reasons why parents choose not to vaccinate their children, some of these are that they think it will overwhelm the children's immune system, they think they contain toxins, they don't trust pharmaceutical companies and they believe vaccines interfere with the relationship with God. Another reason why children don't get vaccinations is because not all parents or caretakers can afford it, as not all countries or states pay for them. WHO and Unicef estimated that in the period of 2010-2015, the immunisation coverage of Europe decreased with around 2%. This while not taking vaccinations can have dangerous consequences, and does not only bring the child's life, but also the lives of those around it in risk. Adults who haven't had the disease as a child could get seriously ill when infected by a sick child. Tragically, every year there are still around 1.5 million deaths each year, which could've been prevented by vaccination.

Definition of Key Terms

Immunisation
Becoming immune to a disease by fortifying the immune system

Antidote
A medicine or remedy that prevents or counteracts the effects of a disease

Unicef
United Nations Children's Fund. An UN programme, concerned with providing humanitarian and developmental assistance to children and mothers in developing countries. Part of the United Nations Development Group.

WHO
An agency of the United Nations, which is specialised in international public health and controlling and preventing communicable diseases on a worldwide basis through various projects and programs.

Global Vaccine Action Plan
A plan endorsed by all Member States in 2012. It is a framework to prevent millions of deaths by 2020 through more equitable access to existing vaccines for people in all communities.

General Overview

At the World Health Assembly in 2012, all Member States endorsed the Global Vaccine Action Plan. At April 22, 2015, we were still way off-track to meet our end-2015 targets set out in this plan, resulting in the fact that 1 in 5 children were still missing out on life-saving vaccinations. So even though 2-3 million lives are saved by vaccination each year, there are still around 1.5 million deaths each year.

The main reasons why children are not being vaccinated are their parent's beliefs. A lot of parents are concerned about the fact that baby's get so many vaccines in a short period of time, that it will cause their immune system to overload. In comparison to the 1970's and 80's, kids get almost twice as much vaccines in the first two years of their life. Despite this, children receive less antigens. So, it is not about the number of vaccinations you get, but rather what is in them. Mark H. Sawyer, M.D., professor of clinical paediatrics at the University of California San Diego School of Medicine and Rady Children's Hospital, also claims that he doesn't see infections in children after getting all the vaccines, and these indicate that their immune system is overloaded.

Parents have also claimed that spacing out vaccine is safer, but in several cases, it is the opposite. With e.g. the measles, the chance of febrile seizures already increase after even just waiting for three months. The recommended vaccination schedule is based upon decades of research by hospitals, universities, epidemiologists and infectious-disease experts. In the vaccines, there are some ingredients that bring risks, such as neomycin and gelatine. These can cause anaphylactic reactions 1 in 1 million doses. They are however needed to prevent bacterial growth in vaccines and to prevent vaccine components from degrading over time. So, the risk of getting sick when not taking them outweighs the risk of getting sick because of taking them. The side effects of taking the vaccines are also never worse than the disease itself, as it takes 10 to 15 years and many studies in order for new vaccines to make it through all four phases of safety-and-effectiveness testing before getting approved. The diseases they fight are all associated with serious complications that can lead to hospitalisations or death, and the most serious confirmed side effect is the one of the rotavirus vaccine. This leads to intussusception – a bowel obstruction that may require surgery – in one of every 20,000 – 100,000 cases.

Many parents use the flu disease as an example of vaccines not really working, and use it as a reason to not vaccinate their child. The flu is an ever-changing disease, because the strains are likely to circulate during each flu season. Moreover, the effectiveness of the vaccine depends on the strains that are picked, and sometimes they get it wrong. There has been a year where only 23% of the flu vaccines were effective, while it could reach to 50-60%. However, 23% less cases still mean a lot of

people were spared, and points out the fact that vaccinations have caused fewer deaths, hospitalizations, and disabilities.

Another claim is that pharmaceutical companies and doctors only use vaccines to make money. As pharmaceutical companies produce products, just like an electronic company does, it is only logical for them to want to achieve profit. Unlike many people think, these companies seldom receive funding from the federal government, this nearly all goes to universities for research. For paediatricians, it is more often a loss or break-even than a profit, because they are expansive to purchase, store and administer.

Only the Christian scientists and the Dutch Reformed Church have demonstrated against vaccinations thus far, without having reasons against it explicitly laid out in their doctrine. In contrast to this, Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science, was reportedly in favour of the vaccines. “Rather than quarrel over vaccination, I recommend, if the law demand, that an individual submit to this process, that he obey the law, and then appeal to the gospel to save him from bad physical results”. The church also urges Catholics to find not turn down immunisations and “sacrifice the common good of public health”. In Judaism, they believe that people have a moral responsibility to maintain their health – which includes getting vaccinated. There are some vaccines that contain pork gelatin, but both leaders in Judaism and the Islam have come forward saying that receiving a vaccine does not constitute oral consumption.

Vaccination laws are different in each country or state. In the US, all states allow medical and religious exemptions with varying requirements. This causes that the disease rates are higher in the states where it is easier to get an exemption. With these differences vaccination laws, you have the fact that some people are not able to pay for vaccinations, because this is different for each country or state. In the Netherlands, for example, the state pays for all 12 provided vaccinations. In some countries, like Australia, people even get offered money to boost compliance rates. Parents can get up to $129 for each child who meets the immunisation requirements between 18 and 24 months of age, and again if the child meets the requirements between 4 and 5 years of age.

There are people doubting if making vaccines compulsory actually increases the awareness of this situation. In Slovenia, there are 9 vaccinations mandatory, and not getting them may result into getting sent to jail or receiving a huge fine. However, there is not a huge difference in the immunisation percentage within countries that have made their vaccinations compulsory and the countries that only recommend it. In some cases, the latter has even proved more effective.

Useful documents

http://www.who.int/immunization/newsroom/factsheets/en/

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vaccination_policy

http://www.who.int/mediacentre/commentaries/vaccine-preventable-diseases/en/

http://www.asset-scienceinsociety.eu/reports/page1.html