

By Timothy Noakes

In his most recent non-peer reviewed blog post (MedicalBriefs, April 5, 2018) representing his personal opinion masquerading as a “scientific” article, Dr Alastair McAlpine (and his assistant) continues to promote his four-year personal campaign with the goal of destroying my scientific credibility. Now he wishes to promote the myth that I am “anti-vax”. (See **Editor’s Note** at end of letter).

This is unfortunate since he knows that this allegation is false. The heading to the article is also defamatory. Where is his (and your) evidence that my pro-vaccination stance is causing some to refuse vaccinations? What are the real facts?

On December 1st 2017 I tweeted the following on my Twitterfeed (@ProfTimNoakes): “Let’s be certain of one thing: Vaccination is one of the true successes of modern medicine and has probably saved more lives than any other treatment in the history of medicine”.

That this has always been my opinion was confirmed by Daryl Ilbury who wrote the biography *Tim Noakes: The Quiet Maverick*. On 5th December 2017 he (@darylilbury) tweeted the following: “When interviewing him for the #TheQuietMaverick, I specifically asked him (Tim Noakes) about his views on vaccination and he said that it has ‘probably saved more lives than any other treatment in the history of medicine’. Research into possible side-effects is ongoing and obviously should be”.

Furthermore, in response to the following tweet from @AndrewDWarner – “Problem is many different mechanisms used in vax and have different effectiveness and safety. Need to talk about each without emotion” – on December 2nd 2017, I tweeted: “So glad to have received Jenner’s miracle to eliminate smallpox. Was also 1st generation to receive Sabin and Salk’s polio vaccine in late 1950s having lived through epidemics of early 1950s. Difficult to describe sense of relief for my parents and for all generations before”.

The source of my “contentiousness” regarding vaccination is apparently my expressed concern on radio that is nothing more than a fundamental teaching to which all medical students are regularly exposed. Which is that any powerful therapeutic, indeed magical, treatment like vaccination is not likely to be without side-effects in at least some.

It appears to me that our profession is under increasing marketing pressure to presume that there are no long-term health consequences associated with the growing promotion of vaccinations for a range of illnesses that were not considered targets of immunization when I was growing up. And I and many in my generation appear to have survived quite well without them. So, my question is simply: Do all of us need all of them all of the time?

Certainly, the vast majority of humans can cope with the introduction of additional foreign immunogenic material including foreign chemicals into their bodies without clearly obvious long-term health consequences. For, example only about 1 in a million vaccinated persons in the US receives compensation of vaccine-induced health damage (1). But what of less obvious damage to health; the type of damage that simply impairs everyday wellness? I refer to the highly contentious article by Mawson and colleagues (2) which seems to suggest that vaccinated children were more likely to suffer from allergies and other maladies than those who had not been vaccinated. There was also strong (associational not causal) evidence that vaccination associated with pre-term birth may produce undesirable health outcomes.

Of course, this is a single associational study which may be quite wrong. But we do ourselves and our patients no favours by simply ignoring published evidence.

The opioid crisis in the US which is also growing in Europe should remind our profession that efficaciousness and safety of any medical intervention are two separate issues. The clearly addictive nature of the opioids already proven in the 1980s was simply ignored because of their efficacy.

But both efficacy and safety of any medical intervention need to be rigorously debated without viciousness, name-calling, defamation and other markers of unprofessional conduct.

Professor Timothy Noakes

Studies comparing vaccinated to unvaccinated populations.

Mawson AR, Brian DR, Bhuiyan AR, Jacob B. Pilot comparative study on the health of vaccinated and unvaccinated 6- to 12-year-old U.S. children. J Transl Sci 2017; 3(3):1-