



UNH Autism Expert Can Comment On Retraction Of Study That Linked Vaccines And Autism

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DURHAM, N.H. – Rae Sonnenmeier, clinical associate professor of communication sciences and disorders at the University of New Hampshire and staff member at UNH's Institute on Disability, is available to discuss the announcement yesterday (Feb. 2, 2010) by the medical journal The Lancet regarding the retraction of a paper that caused a 12-year international battle over the links between the three-in-one childhood vaccine MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) and autism. Sonnenmeier can be reached at 603-862-1860 (work), 603-860-6838 (cell), or Rae.Sonnenmeier@unh.edu.

"The controversy surrounding vaccines has led to many heated debates among families and professionals. Many families have refused to have their children vaccinated because of the concern that the vaccines were not safe. Unfortunately, such decisions have placed children at unnecessary risk for contracting measles, rubella and mumps which are serious diseases that can be prevented by immunization," says Sonnenmeier, whose research concerns augmentative and alternative communication systems to support education for students with disabilities like autism. "The Lancet is to be commended for acknowledging the unethical behavior and formally retracting the original article."

UNH has additional resources and information on autism spectrum disorders at the New Hampshire Resource Center of Autism Spectrum Disorders at the Institute on Disability (www.iod.unh.edu/autism.html) and the Seacoast Child Development Clinic (www.seacoastclinic.unh.edu).

Background:

The original 1998 The Lancet article published by Dr. Andrew Wakefield suggested that there was a link between gastrointestinal difficulties and autism in eight of the 12 reported cases. Families reported regression in their child's development within in 14 days of the MMR vaccine. This paper received considerable attention in both the media and research communities. In 2004, Dr. Richard Horton, editor of The Lancet, described the original paper as "fatally flawed." Yesterday, The Lancet formally retracted the paper. Dr. Wakefield was found guilty of acting unethically in conducting the research.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention reports that there is no link between vaccines and autism. Its work has been coordinated with the National Vaccine Advisory Committee, which monitors the safety of vaccines among its many activities. The largest case-controlled study conducted in the United Kingdom, published in The Lancet in 2004 (Smeeth et al),

concluded that the MMR vaccination was not associated with an increased risk of a child being subsequently diagnosed with autism or other pervasive developmental disorders (PDD).

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,200 graduate students.

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