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Melanie's Marvelous Measles is a children's book that has been written by a parent, Stephanie Messenger. It describes the time in Australia's history when parents didn't fear measles but rather they held measles parties to ensure that their children got measles during childhood. This period was from 1950 until 1970. Measles vaccine was introduced in 1970 – a long time after deaths and illnesses to measles were reduced for the majority of the population. The vaccine was introduced *to see if measles could be eradicated* not because deaths and illnesses to measles were high in 1970.

Parents had measles parties because it was known that measles is less harmful when exposed as a child than as an adolescent or an adult, and natural infection also provides long-term immunity - usually life-long.

Recently, an article by journalist, Tory Shepherd, about the book 'Melanie's Marvelous Measles' was published on news.com.au and there has also been discussion of this book on channel 9's 'Tonight' program. Tory Shepherd used the title '**Deadly disease a 'good thing' for kids, author claims'** to discuss Melanie's Marvelous Measles.

This title is not a fair reflection of the debate that needs to occur on childhood infectious diseases. In addition, the quote in the article from the AMA president, Dr. Steven Hambleton, is designed to stigmatise any individual who speaks about the benefits of catching childhood diseases. Steven Hambleton states in the article '*only the "crazies" thought it would be better to get a disease than be vaccinated. They should be ashamed of themselves'*.

In fact, it is the AMA that should be ashamed of itself for not allowing a proper debate of this topic and for using fear and labels such as 'crazies' to prevent a debate on this issue. Many public members are requesting that we have an academic debate about the right to choose

which vaccines we use and about the number of vaccines that should be included on the childhood schedule of vaccines. In Australia this schedule has been linked to parents receiving \$2,100 in welfare benefits and the issue is not about being pro- or anti-vaccination; it is about the science.

I will publish here the comment that I sent to channel 9 in response to their article. There is a lot of misinformation that is being presented by the media and also by the government because they are selecting and framing the information that is presented.

Here was my response to Tory Shepherd's article '**Deadly disease a 'good thing' for kids' author claims'**:

Tory Shepherd's article contains incorrect information: 1) Measles was not controlled 'through widespread vaccination'. The government documents that prove this fact are published at <http://vaccinationdecisions.net/immunisation-policy/> 2) In Australia the majority of children are not at risk of serious disease when they catch measles. A very small number of children who have measles get a complication of measles such as pneumonia or encephalitis - and these complications can be serious. The public needs to be informed of the number of children who are at risk of getting a complication from measles and whether these complications are linked to socioeconomic factors i.e. the environment 3) Steven Hambleton has not provided any evidence that "it is far more dangerous to actually experience the disease (measles) than it is to be vaccinated." This statement needs to be supported by an accurate number of the adverse reactions that are linked to measles vaccine and compared to the small percentage of children who get a complication of measles such as pneumonia or encephalitis. Steven Hambleton has not provided this information.

The school curriculum in Australia is promoting misinformation to children. In particular, it is stating that infectious diseases have been controlled by vaccines and that vaccines do not cause autism. The government has not provided evidence for either of these two statements. It is

important that the school curriculum includes accurate and balanced information on vaccination and if this is not happening then it is very important that a book like Melanie's Measles is published for community education.

Tory Shepherd's article is framed to suggest that there should not be a debate on this issue and it uses fear of measles to promote its message. The death statistics that are presented in this article are from developing countries where environmental factors are known to be a cause of measles and other infectious diseases. The use of these death statistics is deceiving the public about the risk that measles represents to Australians. Measles was taken off Australia's notifiable disease list in 1950 and a vaccine for measles was not introduced in Australia until 1968. This can be confirmed on the 'immunisation-policy' page of my website.

The media and the government talk about vaccines as if they do not produce any side-effects. For example, Gustav Nossal's article in The Punch titled 'Anti-vaccination arguments are fatally flawed' states that 'the *alleged* side-effects of vaccines are generally trivial and the serious side-effects are vanishingly rare'. This is not accurate quantitative information on the side-effects of vaccines and if the side-effects are never discussed in the media then the public is not properly informed of the harm vaccines can cause. Here is a fact about the compensation that has been paid to parents in America because vaccines have been made compulsory for school entry:

In the US, the Vaccine Injury Compensation Scheme has paid over \$2 billion in damages to over 2,500 families since 1985 and these are only the cases that were allowed by the chosen criteria (Habakus and Holland 2011). Many other claims were refused based on the criteria that were set.

A link to the Habakus and Holland 2011 book 'Vaccine Epidemic' can also be found on the immunisation-policy page of my website. Gustav Nossal also uses the argument that people in developed nations have become more concerned about vaccine side-effects because they no longer see these diseases. He suggests that this is because vaccines have reduced these

diseases to very low levels. This statement is untrue. Most infectious diseases were reduced to very low levels before any of the vaccines were introduced - including measles.

The media, scientists and the government are presenting selective information to the public and stigmatising individuals who speak up on this issue.

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www.vaccinationdecisions.net