

Vaccination Misinformation by Rick Morton

28th January 2014

Rick Morton's article "University paid for anti-vaccine student to attend conference" (28th January 2014) is a biased account concerning my presentation on the HPV vaccine at the Cancer Science and Therapy Conference in San Francisco.

Morton has not provided any evidence for his allegations about the conference and he has not informed readers that the research I presented at the conference has also been published in the peer-reviewed journal *Infectious Agents and Cancer*. Here is the link <http://www.infectagentscancer.com/content/8/1/21>

In presenting this story he uses labels ('anti-vaccine') to influence people's opinion and he does not inform readers that the UOW Dean of Research does not have any concerns about the conference. He stated that all the correct procedures were followed by UOW in the approval of funding and no evidence of improper practices have been provided. I did not reply to the email from Rick Morton because my supervisor informed me there was no story and Morton has not provided an evidence to support his allegations.

Here is the information I received from the Dean of Research that was not provided to readers of the Australian newspaper:

All the correct procedures for the funding of the conference were followed and the university is not aware of any evidence to support the allegations made by Rick Morton. The Dean of Research was satisfied that this international congress was a beneficial experience. Professor Brian Martin was interviewed by Rick Morton before the article appeared. However, Rick Morton works for an independent organisation and he is free to publish what he wishes. This is not something that UOW has any control over.

Morton has written a one-sided story about my presentation. Here is the other side of this story:

1) Morton's article is framed as an 'anti-vaccination' article and it implies that research critical of vaccination should not be funded by the university. This is a clear example of journalists selecting the science they will allow for debate in the media. Research needs to be refuted with valid scientific arguments not ignored by stigmatising the researcher (and the science) with labels such as 'anti-vaccine'.

2) Morton is misinforming the public about the efficacy of HPV vaccines. Cervical cancer is a low risk to Australian women (1.7 deaths per 100,000 women per year *prior* to the vaccine). This disease is only a high risk in *developing* countries (not Australia, Europe or USA) because environmental risk factors play a role in the progression of an HPV infection to cervical cancer. HPV infection on its own does not cause cervical cancer.

Morton fails to mention that because the vaccine only protects against 2 of 15 high-risk HPV strains it is *assumed* that vaccine will prevent about 70% of cervical cancer. This is why Pap screening - an effective and risk free strategy for early detection of cervical cancer will still be needed by vaccinated women. Combined with surgery, Pap screening is 90% effective in preventing cervical cancer.

The risks of the HPV vaccine have been well documented by parents of vaccinated children who regret giving their children this vaccine. This information can be found at www.sanevax.org

Morton also fails to explain how this vaccine can be cost-effective for the Australian government when it is now subsidising 2 programs because the vaccine doesn't protect against all HPV infections that are associated with cancer development. The vaccine costs Au\$430 per individual vaccinated and this is being given to all 10-15 year girls and boys in Australian school programs.

Morton writes for News Ltd and he is a supporter of the Skeptics groups - a non-scientific lobby group that promotes vaccination and other issues. He has written a one-sided story about my presentation that uses labels and associations to influence reader's opinions. Whilst stating that Dr. Thilini Mahaliyana requested the Freedom of Information (FOI)

documents to obtain information about the funding I received, he didn't mention that this doctor works for the Open Australia Foundation which requests FOI documents from Australian public authorities *on behalf of the public*. Dr. Mahaliyana has worked for the Right to Know since 2013.

Rick Morton's article is disinformation and it is another example of the one-sided vaccination debate that the mainstream media is presenting. For more on the representation of the vaccination debate in the media and on social media websites see <http://www.vaccinationdecisions.net/lobby-groups.php>

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