

Newsletter 41 Misinformation Peddled by Journalists and the Australian Skeptics

4th November 2013

I would like to fully address the misinformation that is being used by many journalists to justify not presenting both sides of the vaccination debate. Recently Jane Hansen (Sunday and Daily Telegraph) made the following reply to a polite request that she publish the science on HPV vaccine that was presented at the Cancer Science and Therapy Congress in the USA.

Here is the comment that was used to justify the lack of reporting on this issue:

Jane Hansen's comment:

"Yes, I've read this. I'm going to go with the scientists and medicos who have studied this long and hard before I go with an 'academic' with no medical background who is a known anti-vaccine advocate. My guess is you have no background in science or medicine either, so please don't bore me again with your conspiracy agendas."

Journalists should be asking - 'why are people choosing not to vaccinate' instead of labelling them as 'anti-vaxers' and 'the tin-hat brigade'. It is known that lobby groups with vested interests are using the label 'anti-vaxer' to stigmatise anyone who is questioning the use of vaccines. The people who are choosing not to vaccinate are those that have investigated vaccines and then questioned this practice because of the lack of evidence they have found. These are the people who are requiring evidence for the statement that 'vaccines are safe, effective and necessary'.

The job of a journalist is to present the science that is supporting the position - not to discredit the messenger. In a democracy journalists allow open debate of the science which must stand up to scrutiny. Yet in Australia many journalists are discrediting the messenger and not addressing the science. The public should be aware of any media or social websites that attack researchers instead of providing the science that refutes the arguments they are presenting.

Secondly, the statement that anyone who doesn't have a 'medical background' cannot present the science is a fallacy. Science should be debated on its merit not on the 'qualification of the messenger'. It is the right of every community member to present the science and debate the policy. The arguments can then be addressed on their merits - not the qualifications of the messenger.

Vaccines can only be accepted in public health policy if the community participates in debate and gives their consent to the policy. This requires individuals to be fully informed on this policy and this means being properly informed about the ingredients of vaccines.

If you are aware of any journalist who has presented an article on vaccines that does not discuss the ingredients of vaccines then please write to them and inform them that they have not fully informed the public on this issue. They are providing selective information to promote vaccines. This also applies to doctors. If your doctor has not read out the ingredients of the vaccines before you decide to vaccinate then they have not fully informed you of this procedure. Ask them if they know if the ingredients are safe and request the evidence for their safety. Vaccines should not be accepted on 'blind faith'.

99% of the Australian population does not know what is in a vaccine - this includes our Health Ministers. Blind faith is not evidence-based science and it is important to discuss the ingredients of vaccines openly with many people.

Another journalist that claimed publicly 'there is no other side to the vaccination debate' was Jonathon Holmes (ABC MediaWatch) in 2012. I made a complaint to the Australian Communication and Media Authority (ACMA) in January 2013 stating that this was a breach of the ABC's code of practice for impartial reporting. The AMCA's investigation upheld the journalist's position to not report the science on the other side of the vaccination debate. This results in a media that is presenting opinion and propaganda in Australia and not open scientific debate.

Here is the link to the ACMA report that upheld the right of journalists to not report the science on both sides of the vaccination debate

<http://vaccinationdecisions.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/ACMA-Final-Report-2976-May-2013.pdf>

The media is presenting Rachael Dunlop as a 'pro-vaccination advocate'. Rachael Dunlop is the vice-president of the Australian Skeptics - a group that uses ridicule and misinformation to promote vaccination to the public.

Why are lobby groups being used to promote this policy to the public and not the doctors? It is important that Rachael Dunlop's position in this lobby group is stated when she provides information to the public. Public health policies are for public debate and unless the public challenges the government on this policy the public interest will not be upheld because the community is not equally represented on government advisory boards with industry representatives.

Kind regards,

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