



'Dr Paul' weighs up the 'alternatives' to vaccination and comes out jabbing.

DON'T COME CRYING

IF THERE are two words guaranteed to get my back up they are "homoeopathic" and "vaccination". Especially when they are used together by the parents of a sick child that has just been brought in to the Emergency Department.

I have this terrible urge to say: "If you went to the homeopath when your child was well, why are you bringing them to me now they are sick... go back to the homeopath."

Homoeopathic or naturopathic vaccination is an "alternative" version of vaccination which involves giving natural remedies designed to boost the immune system.

Personally, I don't believe in alternative medicine - there's medicine which has been proven to work (mainstream medicine), and medicine which hasn't (alternative medicine). If an alternative therapy works, it automatically becomes mainstream.

So what would lead someone to risk the life of their most precious asset, their children, with an unproven remedy?

Part of the problem is that vaccination is a victim of its own success; most parents, most quacks, even most doctors haven't seen cases of many of the diseases we vaccinate against. I've never seen diphtheria, or polio. I've never seen typhoid (hell, I can barely even spell it). I've seen tetanus only once... and why? Because we vaccinate against them, so they're as rare as hen's teeth.

What we have all seen is the emotive stuff in anti-vaccination literature, on websites and on the occasional badly-made TV show listing the tragic (and extraordinarily rare) complications of vaccination - and making up a few more to boot.

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Unvaccinated well

SAY WE turn up under your nose at ER, Dr Paul (Focus, July 1), after some cigarette smoking, junk eating, drunk-off-his-head lunatic tries to total our car. You note that our blood pressure is 120/60, yes, even in hospital! Our cholesterol is fine, no anaemia; apart from fractures, all tests check out squeaky clean. But then you see our vaccines are 40-plus years out of date. You note that we both lived through the polio and diphtheria era, and lived to tell the tale, and that

my unvaccinated father is 95 and still going.

You ask if we want tetanus shots. We politely say no, commenting that our deaths obviously haven't been too urgent, especially considering that a tetanus vaccine doesn't give "herd" immunity.

Take a look at your check-list Dr "Paul". How many people who don't vaccinate their kids and who bring their kids up healthily clog up the hospital arteries every day of the year? It isn't because they are protected by the rest of society. Our unvaccinated kids had the following in the late 1980s and '90s: mumps, measles, rubella, chickenpox, whooping cough, and they have been exposed to diphtheria at least twice.

We view what you have to offer in much the same way as we view Pak'n'Save, where we take the fruit, the vegetables, the nuts, the basics without additives, flavour enhancers etc. We leave the junk food, cigarettes and booze to the others who frequent your corridors.

If you really want to go down the Bush road of "either you're with us or against us", why pick out the really informed clients who hardly ever ask for your help?

*Peter and Hilary Butler
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These complications are excruciatingly rare, but they do happen. Personally, I think that the families who do suffer them should be compensated to the max and feted and rewarded as heroes because that's what they are, the small number who have become sick to keep the rest of us safe.

I'm going to go out on a limb here and suggest that people who choose not to vaccinate are really just being selfish. Behind all this "I've made an informed decision not to vaccinate" is that little voice which tells them that it doesn't matter that they don't vaccinate, that they don't need to take the risk of vaccination (however small) because as long as everyone else gets vaccinated, everybody else will be immune, so they'll still be safe.

If you go to a doctor when you're sick, why not take our advice on staying well. Perhaps, the medical profession should take a leaf out of George Bush's book "either you're with us, or you're against us".

If you go to a quack and get vaccinated, then go to them when you get sick too. None of this half-way stuff. The other advantage of this approach is that eventually natural selection will rid the world of the anti-vaccinationists as eventually they'll all die out. Unfortunately, it'll probably take a few thousand years.