

British Medical Journal Declares MMR Study 'an Elaborate Fraud' -- Autism Claims Likened to 'Piltdown Man' Hoax

ScienceDaily (Jan. 6, 2011) — The *British Medical Journal* has declared the 1998 *Lancet* paper that implied a link between the MMR vaccine and autism "an elaborate fraud."

Dr Fiona Godlee, *BMJ* Editor in Chief says "the MMR scare was based not on bad science but on a deliberate fraud" and that such "clear evidence of falsification of data should now close the door on this damaging vaccine scare."

She is struck by a comparison between researcher Andrew Wakefield's fraud and Piltdown man, that great paleontological hoax that led people to believe for 40 years that the missing link between man and ape had been found.

She also questions the veracity of Wakefield's other publications and calls for an investigation "to decide whether any others should be retracted."

A series of three articles starting this week reveal the true extent of the scam behind the scare. The series is based on interviews, documents and data, collected during seven years of inquiries by award-winning investigative journalist Brian Deer.

Thanks to the recent publication of the General Medical Council's six million word transcript, the *BMJ* was able to peer-review and check Deer's findings and confirm extensive falsification in the *Lancet* paper.

In an editorial, Dr Godlee, together with deputy *BMJ* editor Jane Smith, and leading pediatrician and associate *BMJ* editor Harvey Marcovitch, conclude that there is "no doubt" that it was Wakefield who perpetrated this fraud. They say: "A great deal of thought and effort must have gone into drafting the paper to achieve the results he wanted: the discrepancies all led in one direction; misreporting was gross."

Yet he has repeatedly denied doing anything wrong at all, they add. "Instead, although now disgraced and stripped of his clinical and academic credentials, he continues to push his views. Meanwhile the damage to public health continues."

"Science is based on trust," concludes Dr Godlee. "Such a breach of trust is deeply shocking. And even though almost certainly rare on this scale, it raises important questions about how this could happen, what could have been done to uncover it earlier, what further inquiry is now needed, and what can be done to prevent something like this happening again."

The *BMJ* will explore these and other questions over the next two weeks.

MJ-British Medical Journal. "British Medical Journal declares MMR study 'an elaborate fraud' -- autism claims likened to 'Piltdown man' hoax." ScienceDaily 6 January 2011.

Secret Businesses Aimed to Exploit Vaccine Fears, British Medical Journal Investigation Finds

ScienceDaily (Jan. 12, 2011) — Andrew Wakefield, the disgraced doctor who claimed a link between MMR and autism, planned secret businesses intended to make huge sums of money, in Britain and America, from his now-discredited allegations, according to a *British Medical Journal* investigation.

The scheme is exposed in the second part of a *BMJ* series of special reports, "Secrets of the MMR scare," by investigative journalist Brian Deer. Last week we revealed the scientific fraud behind the appearance of a link between the vaccine and autism. Now Deer follows the money.

Drawing on investigations and documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, the report shows how Wakefield's institution, the Royal Free Medical School in London, supported him as he sought to exploit the MMR scare for financial gain.

It reveals how Wakefield met with medical school managers to discuss a joint business even while the first child to be fully investigated in his research was still in the hospital, and how just days after publication of that research, which triggered the health crisis in 1998, he brought business associates to the Royal Free to continue negotiations.

One business, named after Wakefield's wife, intended to develop Wakefield's own "replacement" vaccines, diagnostic testing kits and other products which only stood any real chance of success if public confidence in MMR was damaged.

Documents reveal the planned shareholdings of Wakefield and his collaborators, and how much Wakefield expected to receive personally. Financial forecasts made available for the first time today show Wakefield and his associates predicting they could make up to £28 million (\$43,367,082; €33,290,350) a year from the diagnostic kits alone.

"It is estimated that the initial market for the diagnostic will be litigation driven testing of patients with AE [autistic enterocolitis] from both the UK and the USA," said a 35 page "private and confidential" prospectus obtained by Deer, aimed at raising an initial £700,000 from investors. "It is estimated that by year 3, income from this testing could be about £3,300,000 rising to about £28,000,000 as diagnostic testing in support of therapeutic regimes come on stream."

Deer's investigation also reveals today that Wakefield was offered support to try to replicate his results, gained from just 12 children, with a larger validated study of up to 150 patients, but that he refused to carry out the work, claiming that his academic freedom would be jeopardised. His research claims have never been replicated.

MJ-British Medical Journal. "Secret businesses aimed to exploit vaccine fears, British Medical Journal investigation finds." ScienceDaily 12 January 2011.

From the British Medical Journal's editorial:

Drawing on interviews, documents, and data made public at the GMC [General Medical Council] hearings, Deer shows how Wakefield altered numerous facts about the patients' medical histories in order to support his claim to have identified a new syndrome; how his institution, the Royal Free Hospital and Medical School in London, supported him as he sought to exploit the ensuing MMR scare for financial gain; and how key players failed to investigate thoroughly in the public interest when Deer first raised his concerns.

Deer published his first investigation into Wakefield's paper in 2004. This uncovered the possibility of research fraud, unethical treatment of children, and Wakefield's conflict of interest through his involvement with a lawsuit against manufacturers of the MMR vaccine. Building on these findings, the GMC launched its own proceedings that focused on whether the research was ethical. But while the disciplinary panel was examining the children's medical records in public, Deer compared them with what was published in the Lancet. His focus was now on whether the research was true.

... He found that not one of the 12 cases reported in the 1998 Lancet paper was free of misrepresentation or undisclosed alteration, and that in no single case could the medical records be fully reconciled with the descriptions, diagnoses, or histories published in the journal.

... A great deal of thought and effort must have gone into drafting the paper to achieve the results he wanted: the discrepancies all led in one direction; misreporting was gross. Moreover, although the scale of the GMC's 217 day hearing precluded additional charges focused directly on the fraud, the panel found him guilty of dishonesty concerning the study's admissions criteria, its funding by the Legal Aid Board, and his statements about it afterwards.

... Wakefield has been given ample opportunity either to replicate the paper's findings, or to say he was mistaken. He has declined to do either.