

Using Fear & Prejudice to Attack Vaccine Exemptions

Posted: 8/4/2010 8:51:21 PM | with [13 comments](#)

by **Barbara Loe Fisher**

This summer, inaccurate and misleading information about B. pertussis whooping cough and the pertussis vaccine is being put out there by medical doctors, who should know better. Media campaigns designed to create fear about infectious disease are nothing new. This one appears to have three goals: first, to emphasize pertussis risks while ignoring vaccine risks; second, to place blame for whooping cough cases and deaths on the unvaccinated; and, third, to attack religious and conscientious belief exemptions, which serve as informed consent protections in U.S. vaccine laws.

In 2009, public health officials declared a pandemic H1N1 influenza emergency and played up the potential complications of the swine flu while playing down the potential risks of the untested new swine flu vaccine.¹ When two-thirds of Americans “just said no” to swine flu shots, NBC’s chief medical editor Dr. Nancy Snyderman ridiculed them and quipped “*Just get the damn vaccine.*”²

Now Snyderman has issued a similar standing order to “get vaccinated” but, this time, she is accusing parents of unvaccinated children for causing the deaths of six California infants, who have reportedly died from complications of B. pertussis whooping cough. On July 28, 2010, Dr. Snyderman further alleged that “most people” with religious objections to vaccination are not telling the truth and that the “needs” of the “community as a whole” are “better than the individual” and “more important.”³

Ordinarily I would not take the time to address specific comments by a prominent doctor, who is careless with the facts when voicing an opinion. But as more doctors use the bully pulpit of the national media – unchallenged - to disseminate incorrect information, promote personal ideological views and advance political agendas, it becomes more important for informed Americans to speak up.

Responding to recent press releases and media reports, in which California health officials say the state is experiencing the worst whooping cough outbreak in 50 years with about 1500 reported cases and six infants dying from B. pertussis,⁴ on July 28 Dr. Snyderman offered the following explanation:

“I think that what we are seeing here is a tipping point in unvaccinated children because the hot pockets are in families where, frankly, parents have under-vaccinated or decided not to vaccinate their children.”⁵

A quick fact check reveals that both California health officials and Snyderman have not been entirely honest with the people. The Centers for Disease Control’s published morbidity and mortality report shows that in the past 12 months, between July 24, 2009 and July 24, 2010, there were a total of 809 “provisional” cases of whooping cough reported in California.⁶ In fact, in the *entire* United States of America for the week ending July 24, there were only 187 reported cases of whooping cough, with no cases occurring in California.

When disease incidence statistics publicized by state health departments do not match those published by federal health agencies, there is something wrong. It is time for California health officials to fully disclose complete details of the 1500 whooping cough cases they allege have occurred in the state during the past year, including how many cases were lab confirmed as B. pertussis; how many cases were classified as “epidemiologically linked” - which means they were NOT lab confirmed; and the ages and vaccination status of all cases, including whether people with suspected or confirmed cases had been given 1,2,3,4,5,6 or more pertussis shots.

Most doctors know perfectly well that getting 3 to 6 doses of pertussis vaccine or more does not give lifelong immunity to whooping cough, and that other viruses and bacteria, such as parapertussis and RSV - which are *not* covered by the vaccine - can be misdiagnosed as pertussis if proper lab tests are not done. ^{7, 8} In addition, public health officials know that B. pertussis bacteria have been evolving and become vaccine resistant, making the pertussis vaccine much less effective. ⁸

So Snyderman is engaging in pure speculation when she blames whooping cough-related deaths on the unvaccinated. The truth is that infants can be as easily exposed to B. pertussis by coming into contact with a fully vaccinated infected person as with an unvaccinated person. ⁹

Dr. Snyderman goes on state that, **“These are 6 infants who have lost their lives who, frankly, should not have died.”**

I agree. It is tragic when babies die from whooping cough and it is tragic when babies get pertussis containing vaccines and suffer convulsions, collapse/shock, high pitched screaming and other signs of brain inflammation and then, die. ¹⁰ It is a tragedy when any baby dies, regardless of the cause.

No fear campaign about infectious disease would be complete without bringing up polio. Snyderman says, **“We were given our polio vaccine and the idea was that, if you get a vaccination, you will not get ill and you will not die.”**

Yes, that was the “idea” but it is not a fact. Every vaccine carries a risk of injury and death that can be greater for some than others. There is no guarantee the vaccine will prevent an infectious disease and, depending upon the vaccine, it could actually give you the vaccine strain of the disease it is supposed to prevent.

In 1999, the U.S. abandoned use of the live virus oral polio vaccine to prevent individuals in America from being paralyzed by vaccine strain polio. ¹¹ A lot of people don't know that, if you swallow the live virus polio vaccine, you can get paralyzed and die. On top of that, recently vaccinated persons shed live poliovirus in their body fluids for weeks. People who come in close contact with them can get vaccine strain polio and be paralyzed or die.

Today, a killed polio vaccine is used in America because parents of vaccine injured children lobbied in the 1990's to get the polio vaccine policy changed.

But Dr. Snyderman only tells one side of the polio story, charging that: **“Now people, frankly, have amnesia from the event. They forget what it was like to see people with these communicable diseases.”**

There are plenty of Americans, like me, who remember lining up for polio shots in the 1950's and 60's and were informed 40 years later, in the 1990's, that a lot of those experimental polio shots were contaminated with a monkey virus, simian virus 40, that causes cancer in lab animals and has been associated with brain, bone and lung cancers in children and adults. ^{12, 13}

We *do* remember polio and the iron lung. But we also remember not being told the whole truth about polio vaccine risks.

Then Snyderman takes out the big club and warns: **“I worry that, if we are under-vaccinating our children are you start to see things like whooping cough coming back, this is the canary in the coal mine. Last year we saw children die of measles and I worry that, if we see whooping cough and measles, that polio can't be far away.”**

Let's take another look at official federal disease incidence statistics to see whether that “worry” is justified or is just a lot of hype. In 2009, out of 300 million people living in the United States, there were 71 cases of measles reported. This year, there have been 32 cases of measles. That's right: 32. There have been no cases of polio reported in America this year and only 1 case since 2006. ¹⁴

Get a grip, Dr. Snyderman.

“In a country like this, where vaccinations are available, these communicable and infectious and deadly diseases shouldn't even be talked about,”says Snyderman.

Most doctors know that vaccines only give temporary immunity at best and that microbes, like B. pertussis, are constantly evolving to survive. ^{15, 16} That's why five or more doses of pertussis vaccine still can't prevent all whooping cough disease. So we will be talking about whooping cough, measles, mumps, chicken pox and lots of other infectious diseases for a long, long time in this country and in every country, whether we get vaccinated or not.

“You know I have been an unabashed, unapologetic advocate for vaccinations. They are safe. They work,” says Snyderman.

Many American doctors are “unapologetic” mandatory vaccination advocates because that is what they are told to be by public health officials and leaders in major medical organizations, such as the American Academy of Pediatrics ¹⁷ and the American Medical Association. ¹⁸ In fact, about 40 percent of pediatricians in America today proudly say they flatly deny medical care to families, who refuse to follow their orders to “get vaccinated.” ¹⁹

As important, though, is the question: How many of these doctors refuse to speak to, associate with, and condemn other doctors, who do treat patients making selective vaccine choices?

The truth is, vaccines are not safe for everyone and they do not work for everyone. When doctors only tell half the truth about vaccine benefits and risks, people can sense it. And when they demean and threaten patients, who ask questions or disagree with them, the fragile bond of trust between doctors and patients is broken.

Like when Dr. Snyderman demeans Americans, who exercise religious exemption to vaccination, an exemption which exists in all but two states. ***“A lot of people are opting out on them [vaccines] and saying, “Well, it’s against my religion” and I would say, for most people, that is just not true,”***she says.

It is annoying when anyone pretends to know another person’s mind, heart and soul. But it is frightening when doctors believe they are entitled to judge the sincerity of another person’s religious or conscientiously held beliefs. With this comment, Dr. Snyderman has assumed the position of an Inquisitor. There is some comfort in knowing that the rack is no longer in fashion and the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution ²⁰ has not yet been repealed.

“Make sure your children are vaccinated,”says Snyderman.

This simplistic, one-size-fits-all approach to vaccination is dangerous. Because there are children, who are at higher risk for becoming brain injured or dying after getting pertussis containing vaccines (DTaP, Tdap), including those who have suffered previous vaccine reactions like:^{21, 22}

- Very high fever
- High pitched screaming or persistent crying
- Convulsions (with or without fever)
- Collapse/shock (also known as hypo-tonic/hypo-responsive episodes)
- Brain Inflammation and encephalopathy

For a full list of precautions for children, teenagers and adults, read the manufacturer product inserts and get more information about how to recognize a vaccine reaction at www.NVIC.org. Find out whether the pertussis vaccine your doctor is recommending for your child has been studied for safety and effectiveness when given at the same time as other vaccines. For example, many pertussis vaccines have not been studied in clinical trials when a flu shot is given at the same time.

“If you are an adult and you are around a child under the age of one, get vaccinated,”says Snyderman.

Again, it is important to know whether you, as an adult, are at high risk for suffering a pertussis vaccine reaction, such as being sick at the time of vaccination.

“If you are a woman of childbearing years, get vaccinated,”says Snyderman.

How many pregnant women, whose doctors urge them to get a booster shot (Tdap), know that the vaccine has not been thoroughly studied in pregnant women? Or that manufacturer product inserts include this disclaimer: ²³

Animal reproduction studies have not been conducted.....It is not known whether [the vaccine] can cause fetal harm when administered to a pregnant woman, or can affect reproductive capacity. [The vaccine] has not been evaluated for carcinogenic or mutagenic potential, or for impairment of fertility.

But wait - Dr. Snyderman even tries to make us believe that unvaccinated *people* can infect immune compromised people simply by walking past them in the grocery store! No, really. She says:

“And if you think, well, you can opt out [of vaccination], remember that, when you go to the grocery store and you walk by someone who has cancer or MS or any other compromised immune system, you put that person in harms way, too.”

Is that the kind of immunology being taught in medical schools today? ^{24, 25} That an unvaccinated person can transmit infectious disease without hand shaking or kissing or coughing or sneezing - just a simple walk-by will do? ²⁶

And, finally, Dr. Snyderman gets to the heart the matter and promotes her personal ideological belief, which requires devaluing the individual:

“There is a time, when the community as a whole, their needs are better than the individual and, I think, more important,” says Snyderman.

This kind of thinking is called utilitarianism, ^{27, 28} a political philosophy that was judged to be a pseudo-ethic by the Nuremberg Tribunal

at the Doctor's Trial in 1946. The judges at Nuremberg exposed what happened when doctors used the utilitarian rationale to conduct scientific research during World War II that forced individuals to risk their lives in drug, vaccine and other medical experiments. ²⁹

The Nuremberg Code, which defined the ethical principle of informed consent, has served as the foundation for the ethical practice of medicine for more than half a century. The informed consent principle makes it clear that the rights of the individual cannot, ethically, be sacrificed to the needs or interests of society. ³⁰

But Dr. Snyderman goes further and marginalizes and condemns individuals, who do not agree with her utilitarian view.

“Right now, individuals are trumping the general populace at large and I find that, frankly, offensive and amoral,”says Snyderman.

It is disturbing when prominent doctors tell half-truths and promote fear, hate and prejudice. We want to believe the doctors we trust with our health and our children's lives care about us as individuals.

Most people consider it is offensive and amoral to write off a minority of individuals as expendable in service to the rest. Because then, the question becomes: How many individuals can be sacrificed for what some in positions of authority have defined as “the greater good?” Is it 300? 3,000? 30,000? Or can we go as high as three million? That is only 1 percent of 300 million Americans, after all.

The truth is, nobody knows how many vaccine victims there are in America, how many of the 1 in 6 learning disabled children; or the 1 in 9 with asthma; or the 1 in 100 who develop autism; or the 1 in 450 who become diabetic, can trace their chronic inflammation, disease and disability back to vaccine reactions that have been dismissed by public health officials and doctors for the past century as just “a coincidence.” ³¹ ³²

When parents of vaccine injured children held the first public demonstration in front of the CDC in Atlanta on May 12, 1986, the larger question we asked public health officials was “Do you know how many?” After we marched, we made presentations to the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, (ACIP) and asked the Committee questions and, then, I gave a report on my investigation into whooping cough outbreaks in 1985, which had been heavily publicized by physician officials at the American Academy of Pediatrics. I found that many of the whooping cough cases reported in eight states in 1985 had *not* been lab confirmed and the majority had occurred in vaccinated children and adults. (You can read a transcript of what happened at that May 1986 CDC meeting on NVIC's website) ³³

Nothing much has changed in the last 25 years. Whooping cough is still infecting both vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals. There are pertussis increases every four to five years, no matter how high the vaccination rate.³² Many children and adults survive whooping cough disease without complications but some do not. And some doctors in positions of power are still in the business of creating fear and demonizing those, who make informed health choices that do not include use of 16 government recommended vaccines. ³³, ³⁴ ³⁵

Dr. Snyderman concludes her diatribe by focusing on her own fears, while wistfully clinging to the myth that vaccines will eradicate all infectious diseases in America - if only every man, woman and child would dutifully comply with doctors' orders to “get vaccinated.”

“I think this winter, as whooping cough upticks, measles continues to be under-vaccinated, we're going to increasingly see pockets of communicable infections that a few decades ago we thought, frankly, we had eradicated from the United States. These illnesses should not be seen in the United States with the vaccinations that we have at hand,”says Snyderman.

Abe Lincoln once said “*You can fool some of the people all of the time and all of the people some of the time, but you can't fool all the people all of the time.*”

How long is it going to take for medical doctors, who have abandoned their critical thinking skills and lost themselves in orthodoxy, to stop fooling themselves so they can accurately inform their patients about the benefits and risks of vaccination ³⁶ ³⁷ and respect the choices their patients make? ³⁸ ³⁹

Whatever doctors decide to do and whether they ever conduct the good scientific studies that will answer outstanding questions about vaccination, individuals should always have the freedom to exercise informed consent to medical risk-taking. That freedom protects individuals and minorities from exploitation by those in positions of authority in society, who do not know what they do, as well as from those who do know what they are doing.

The freedom to make an informed, voluntary decision about what we are willing to risk our lives or our children's lives for is not just an individual need, it is a human right. It is a human right and a freedom worth defending in this and every century.

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Comments

Dr. Kimberly Moynihan

Very well done! Couldn't have written it better myself! THANK YOU!

8/5/2010 2:51:12 PM

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Andrea

Thank you! Religious exemptions are discriminated against even when they are not supposed to be. I can't wait till the day that doesn't happen.

8/5/2010 4:34:32 PM

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jerry

Thank you for addressing each point specifically. Two things could be added as well: first, request Dr. Snyderman to provide the science backing her arguments (I think we know there is none); and, second, asking NBC how it is that they employ a non-scientific individual in a scientific role.

8/5/2010 5:14:30 PM

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Anita D. Knupp

This MD makes my blood boil! My son got the bloody whooping cough after he was vaccinated for it. In fact, he caught it 2Xs!!! He also got the measles after having been vaccinated for them. The MD admitted 1/2 of all reported measles cases in OH (the state we lived in at the time) had been vaccinated!

8/5/2010 8:07:16 PM

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Stephanie Condon

Thank you for the insight and always providing us with BOTH sides of the issue. The Today Show needs to let go of Dr. Snyderman. Love the show, can't stand her views!

8/5/2010 9:48:10 PM

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Laurel Clark

Again, I am impressed with the straight-forward, well-spoken words of Ms. Fisher. I feel a bit of relief and resolve in my quest to do what's best for my kids whenever I read or hear her responses. Thank you!

8/5/2010 9:58:18 PM

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Jerry

I have a family member who is a pharmacist and is a deep believer of pharmaceutical company propaganda. The drug companies are doing CEs on whooping cough. They say that the reason the suspected cases are not lab confirmed is that in order to do so the patient would have very long swab stuck through their nostril, up their sinus and back some ways. Sounds painful. Is that true of the test?

8/6/2010 12:28:45 AM

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Amy Murphy

Wow! You've outdone yourself, Barbara. This is brilliant -- good for you, and, as always, thank you for your intelligent, measured analysis. I've been with you since 1982, when you were "D.P.T.". At that time, I was grateful to Phil Donahue for airing this issue when no one else would TOUCH it. And Dr. Mendelsohn, another giant to whom we owe a tremendous debt.

8/6/2010 12:29:26 AM

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Peter

I think you should add more information about those 6 tragically died infants:

- were they healthy before getting ill?
- how were they treated, possible overdosis of antibiotics?
- were those infants not misdiagnosed at the beginning of their illness - mistreated with unnecessary drugs?
- possible other questions that could better explain those tragical events

8/6/2010 3:11:26 AM

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Michelle

Barbara, I love the way you reference each of the salient points you make, and am consistently impressed with the quality of those references. Thank you for being a voice of cogency, illumination, intelligence and common sense.

8/6/2010 10:40:07 PM

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James A Dray

Thanks for the voice of reason and the answer to the propagandists of vaccine. They rely on fear, guilt, and peer pressure to achieve their goals. The lack of controlled studies to verify vaccine efficacy is a telling factor. They will use this to condemn other practices, but god-forbid they submit to this same standard for vaccine.

8/7/2010 11:28:47 AM

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Laurette Janak

Barbara,
As an avid reader of the medical literature I am particularly appreciative of your links directly to the science. Thank you,
Laurette Janak

8/7/2010 2:34:48 PM

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Michelle

Barbara, I love the way you reference each of the salient points you make, and am consistently impressed with the quality of those references. Thank you for being a voice of cogency, illumination, intelligence and common sense.

8/14/2010 10:36:03 PM

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