

Peer Pressure and the Flu Vaccine



Propaganda pushes vaccine on the public

by Michael Braunstein

Do you remember the first time you went to your parents with the excuse, "But everybody's doing it?" Their retort might have been the old cliché, "Well, if Johnny jumped off the Brooklyn Bridge, would you?"

What your parents were likely trying to convey is that learning to use your own best judgment is a valuable lesson. Unfortunately, even as adults we sometimes suspend that judgment and believe propaganda rather than thinking for ourselves.

Every year about this time the media glut begins. The pharmaceutical companies start pushing their seasonal cash cow, the flu vaccine. It seems like a bigger push this year. Drug kingpin Novartis has even started a television campaign aimed directly at consumers that preys on the fear of a disease that kills far fewer yearly than commonly believed. And remember, we are the *only* country in the world (aside from the tiny nation of New Zealand,) that allows a drug seller to advertise directly to consumers.

You've been subjected to the slanted media blitz supporting flu shots. Before you subject yourself to a prick with a needle, review some of the reasons that might help you see the flu vaccine from a perspective other than the way the drug companies want you to.

Peer-reviewed research questions flu shots

An October 2007 report in the prestigious medical journal *The Lancet* is one of many that have found that the flu vaccine doesn't protect like

the drug companies imply, particularly for the elderly. Lead researcher Dr. Lisa Jackson, who has studied the vaccine for years and is actually a supporter of it, had to admit in news releases, "You just shouldn't look at the data and think this works." The study looked at some of the best research and found that even as vaccination rates increased, it had no statistical benefit for elderly.

Even studies by the Center for Disease Control have concluded the ineffectiveness of the vaccine. After the 2003-2004 "flu season," the CDC said the vaccine was ineffective most of the time. Each year the vaccine makers hazard a guess. They guess which strain of influenza virus will be prevalent and design their drug to fight that one. If they guess wrong, as they did in 2003, the vaccine is useless. That year it missed the target, CDC said. To paraphrase Dirty Harry, "You've gotta ask yourself, 'Do I feel lucky?' Well, do ya?"

Office managers and business owners, heed this: You're worried about time lost on the job? A major report, the Cochrane Report, found that flu shots had *no* impact on days off for illness over the season.

In a 2005 article in the *Washington Post*, Veterans Administration research physicians Steven Woloshin, Lisa Schwartz and Gilbert Welch wrote that both flu risk and the vaccine's benefits are highly exaggerated, concluding that, "Public health officials should not exaggerate risks or benefits to promote vaccination. [People] may grow cynical and end up ignoring

health messages that really matter."

Follow the money (and the perks)

A study published in the April 2007 *New England Journal of Medicine* found that 95 percent of doctors receive free food, beverages, drug samples, sports tickets or other benefits from drug company sales reps eager to influence their prescribing habits. Many receive fees for speaking engagements or workshops. That's a natural business practice, right? But this is influence peddling and health care. That influence goes a long way and many institutions don't think it's right. Medical centers at Yale, Stanford, UCLA, University of Pennsylvania and UC Davis, among others, have shifted ethics policies to reject gifts from drug companies. That ranges from dollars to donuts, pens to notepads.

Quoted in the *Sacramento Bee*, Dr. Garen Wintemute of UC Davis said, "It is widely viewed by people on both sides of this issue that those gifts are the currency the industry spends to get access to professionals in training

and in practice."

Personal experience

Do you remember a couple years ago when there was a flu vaccine shortage? (It was October of 2004.) Then the official line CDC was much different. They took the reassuring stance that going without a shot was no big deal. Or do you remember a time when you or someone you know got a flu shot and got sick anyway?

Methinks they doth protest too much

About peer pressure, especially by employers, this is my own favorite question to ask. The syllogism would go like this:

"If you get a flu shot truly believing they keep you from getting the flu, and I don't get a flu shot and somehow get the flu, then you still won't get the flu, right?"

That's the way a syllogism works. If A and B are true, then C is true.

So why would you worry whether I get a flu shot or not? You're protected by that vaccine that you swear by, right? After all, if you didn't believe that, why in the world would you get one? Because Johnny did?

Is it real or Memorex?

Ever consider that sometimes getting a little sick is natural? Natural immunization to the flu occurs when you have the flu and recover. If you recover from flu strain A, for example, you're immune to it (and its close relatives) for life. Flu shot immunity lasts only a few weeks, if it works at all. That's why they get to sell you one every year.

Getting a flu shot is a personal choice. It's not legislated yet, at least. And by the way, Ron Paul is the only presidential candidate who has stated vaccinations shouldn't be mandated. I don't advise one way or the other. Just know the points before you follow Johnny off that bridge. If the person recommending a flu shot is writing the prescription with a pen that has a drug company name on it, how did you miss that?

Visit the National Vaccine Information Center, nvic.org/diseases/influenzafacts.htm for more information. Flu-related articles mentioned here and others are found at heartland-healing.com/flu.

Be well.

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COOL CATS, HOT MUSIC: Little Charlie Baty (left) and Rick Estrin (right) are 30-year partners in one of the best blues bands on the planet. Little Charlie & the Nightcats gig at Murphy's Thursday, Oct. 11, 5:30-8:30 p.m.

Soulful Standouts

by B.J. Huchtemann

Good seats are still available for the "Solid Blues" tour hitting Lincoln's Lied Center Monday, Oct. 29, 7:30 p.m. The show features longtime Zoo favorite **Charlie Musselwhite**, who took home four Blues Music Awards in 2007 for his newest disc, *Delta Hardware*, including both Album of the Year and Traditional Blues Album of the Year. His song, "Church is Out," garnered him Song of the Year honors. Musselwhite has been recognized with the award for Best Instrumentalist—Harmonica in almost every year the prizes have been given. Seriously, check out the awards archives at blues.org.

Musselwhite is joined by soul-blues-gospel artist **Mavis Staples**, **North Mississippi Allstars** and keyboard player **Joe Crown**. Staples received a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award and has been inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. The North Mississippi Allstars will back the three other artists and the results are bound to be electrifying. Tickets are \$38 and \$28 in advance for the general public; student and youth ticket prices are available. Tickets are available at liedcenter.org or 402.472.4747.

Murphy's & the Zoo

Little Charlie & the Nightcats, the West Coast kings of cool, jumpin' blues, take the stage at Murphy's Thursday, Oct. 11, 5:30-8:30 p.m. The California-based band only makes one or two stops a year locally. It regularly plays big festival stages and seeing the group on a small club stage is a real treat. Little Charlie, Rick Estrin and the band are touring in support of their latest Alligator release, *Nine Lives*.

Popular soul-blues vocalist and entertainer **E.C. Scott** makes two stops in the metro next week. Scott takes charge at the Zoo Bar Wednesday, Oct. 17, 6-9 p.m. and turns up the

heat at Murphy's on Thursday, Oct. 18, 5:30-8:30 p.m.

Tinsley Ellis hits the Zoo Tuesday, Oct. 23, 6-9 p.m. Ellis gigs at Murphy's on Thursday, Oct. 25.

Benefit for K.C. Singer

Hacienda Brothers drummer **Dale Daniel** wrote a while back to ask if this column could help spread the word about K.C. jazz singer **Megan Birdsall** and her efforts to raise money for a necessary surgery. The *Kansas City Star* newspaper has called her "one of Kansas City's most impressive young jazz singers on the rise." Birdsall has been stricken with severe arthritis and degenerative changes in her jaw or temporomandibular joints (TMJ). The disorder has left her in extreme pain and will ultimately mean that, without treatment, she will be unable to sing, talk and eventually, eat. Necessary surgery costs exceed \$120,000.

On Wednesday, Oct. 17, Birdsall releases her newest CD at Jardine's, 4536 Main St., in K.C. The event also is a benefit to raise money for her necessary medical procedures. Tax-deductible donations can be made to Birdsall via The Kansas City Jazz Ambassadors and their Musician Emergency Assistance Fund (MEAF).

Birdsall's training includes study with Broadway artists Anne Reinking and the late Gregory Hines. She has been a regular performer on the jazz club circuit in K.C. For more information visit meganbirdsall.com, call 816.804.1781 or email rachelcmurphy92@hotmail.com.

Hot Notes

Kris Lager Band's Oct. 12 gig at Downtown Blues has been postponed until Friday, Oct. 26. Reggae band **Rhythm Collective** performs Oct. 12 instead. At McKenna's this weekend, catch **The Mercurys** Friday, Oct. 12, and **Magic Slim** on Saturday, Oct. 13.



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