

Dilution or Delusion?

Meningococcal meningitis is quite a rare disease – it is estimated that approximately 200 cases occur in Australia each year, but it results in a high rate of fatalities (around 30) and it can leave devastating effects in those who survive. Despite its rarity, it attracts a great deal of concern that might, to some, seem out of proportion to its prevalence. However, it is a particularly horrible disease in that the people most at risk are young children and those in their mid- to late-teens, and that its progress from rather commonplace symptoms to a full-blown threat to life is so incredibly rapid.

It is not surprising, therefore, that this disease has attracted a great deal of attention from both the medical authorities and from the news media. Furthermore, while there is a vaccine that prevents infection, it is not universally applicable to all strains of the disease, nor is it widely available. The Federal Government, seeking to make best use of the scarce (and expensive) vaccine, has recently announced that the stocks available will be used to immunise children aged one year, and 15-16 year-old adolescents. Few in the community would quibble with that, but that is not the issue that concerns Australian Skeptics

Through the untiring efforts of Cheryl Freeman, whose reports on dubious “therapeutic” devices and practices have appeared many times in *the Skeptic*, we became aware that various “natural” or “alternative” practitioners were prescribing “homoeopathic meningococcal vaccine” as a preventative measure for this disease and similar “vaccines” for a number of other very serious diseases. Furthermore, Cheryl was able

to acquire these “vaccines” and homoeopathic “prophylaxes” for a wide range of other very serious diseases (including smallpox, TB and malaria), by mail, and from a number of different suppliers, with no difficulty at all.

We have in our possession three bottles (see photo) purporting to contain Homoeopathic Meningococcal Vaccine, Hepatitis B Vaccine and Influenza Vaccine, each bearing a number “C200”.



Homoeopathic “vaccines” recently purchased via the mail

In homoeopathic parlance this means that the active ingredient has been diluted by a factor of 1 in 10⁴⁰⁰. (That’s correct, a one followed by 400 zeros. One does not need to be a mathematician to realise that an aspirin dissolved in the Pacific Ocean would be nowhere near as dilute as these “vaccines” purport to be.) It is important to understand that there is precisely no evidence to suggest that any of these “vaccines” have any effect at all in protecting consumers against any of these diseases.

Alarmed, Cheryl (supported by *the Skeptic*) sought to bring this state of affairs to the notice of the authorities and the media. It would seem obvious, given all the media attention being focused on outbreaks of meningococcal, that a story about a

fake vaccination against it should have been considered highly newsworthy, but that was not the case. The story was transmitted to most media outlets in Australia, however, only the *Newcastle Herald* (briefly) and the *Sydney Daily Telegraph* ran with it. Unfortunately, the *Telegraph* story gave credit neither to Cheryl, nor to *the Skeptic*, and ran the story as though it was the result of its own research. It was later taken up by the *Ch 10 News* and *NBN 3 News* in Newcastle (Cheryl Freeman’s home town). It seems that “investigative journalism” no longer applies to the Australian media (see also Peter Bowditch’s story p9).

An unsatisfactory state of affairs, but at least it brought one good result. The TGA immediately banned the use of the Homoeopathic Meningococcal Vaccine, although whether this extends to all the other such “vaccines” (including that for hepatitis B - a far more prevalent disease) we have yet been unable to determine.

As we have constantly reiterated, although there is a great deal of public acceptance of so-called “alternative” therapies, and although some of them may well be positively beneficial, and others relatively harmless, the false sense of security offered by worthless remedies or preventatives, widely used and with no controls on their use, poses a serious threat to the health of the community.

It is simply not good enough that the exposure of these should be left to a dedicated few, such as Cheryl Freeman. The authorities must be more active in investigating abuse, as the media are reduced largely to forms of cheap entertainment.

Barry Williams