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## Study Linking Autism to Vaccine Retracted

Daniel J. DeNoon

February 2, 2010 — The venerable British medical journal *The Lancet* has retracted a 1998 study suggesting a link between autism and childhood vaccination with the measles-mumps-rubella MMR vaccine.

*The Lancet* tells WebMD that it has retracted "10 or 15" studies in its 186-year history. The retraction follows the finding of the U.K. General Medical Council (GMC) that says study leader Andrew Wakefield, MD, and two colleagues acted "dishonestly" and "irresponsibly" in conducting their research.

*The Lancet* specifically refers to claims made in the paper that the 12 children in the study were consecutive patients that appeared for treatment, when the GMC found that several had been selected especially for the study. The paper also claimed that the study was approved by the appropriate ethics committee, when the GMC found it had not been.

"We fully retract this paper from the published record," *The Lancet* editors say in a news release.

The retraction means the study will no longer be considered an official part of the scientific literature.

*BMJ*, formerly known as the *British Medical Journal*, has competed with *The Lancet* since 1840. *BMJ* editor Fiona Godlee says she welcomes the *Lancet* retraction.

"This will help to restore faith in this globally important vaccine and in the integrity of the scientific literature," Godlee says in a news release.

In 2004, 10 of Wakefield's 13 co-authors disavowed the findings of the 1998 study. Although the study never claimed to have definitively proven a link between the MMR vaccine and autism, sensational media reports ignited a public panic. MMR vaccinations fell dramatically.

More rigorous studies have found no link between autism and the MMR vaccine. Last year, the U.S. "vaccine court" rejected U.S. lawsuits claiming that there was a plausible link between the vaccine and autism.

Wakefield continues to proclaim his innocence and defends his earlier work. He now resides in Texas, where he is executive director of an alternative medicine center for autism treatment and research.

### SOURCES:

*The Lancet*, published online Feb. 2, 2010.

News release, *The Lancet*.

News release, *BMJ*.

Thoughtful House web site.

General Medical Counsel: "Fitness to Practise Panel Hearing, 28 January 2010."

## Authors and Disclosures

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