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

The BMJ 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 Paediatrician 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.

Sources: 1. F. Godlee, J. Smith, H. Marcovitch. Wakefield's article linking MMR vaccine and autism was fraudulent. *BMJ*, 2011; 342 (jan05 1):c7452 DOI: 10.1136/bmj.c7452.

2. B. Deer. How the case against the MMR vaccine was fixed. *BMJ*, 2011; 342 (jan05 1): c5347 DOI: 10.1136/bmj.c5347.