

Blog

# Write, rant, and speak up: a (failed) letter to editor about vaccination

📅 June 2, 2017 👤 Bryn ✎ Edit

## Blog

Chercheuse en résidence / Scholar in Residence

**Abby Lippman**, Professor Emerita, Department of Epidemiology, Biostatistics and Occupational Health, McGill University; Research Associate, Simone de Beauvoir Institute, Concordia University

*Publié/Published:* 2 Jun 20172017 A Lippman, [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](#)

Conflit d'intérêts	Conflicts of Interest
Aucun déclaré	None to declare
Exonération	Disclaimer
Les opinions exprimées ici sont celles de l'auteur et ne reflètent pas nécessairement celles de la revue.	The views expressed here are the author's and do not necessarily reflect those of the journal.

There are mornings, too many of them perhaps for tranquil coffee-drinking, when a newspaper story sets off bells and leads to the need to rant. Often this leads to writing a Letter to the Editor, useful for

letting off steam immediately. But not always a medium for much reflection, given the length limits these have. Moreover, letters must be sent as rapidly as possible so they can appear the next day or, at most, within 2 days of the initial story.

Besides this process privileging those with writing skills, short fuses for irritating news, and mornings free from daily tasks (unpaid and paid), letter writers are also selected for publication by arcane invisible criteria...with the most critical commentaries often excluded from the mainstream media.

So what do frustrated letter writers do with their rejected rants? Until we have our own proper “dead letter box” perhaps sharing them through lists, blog sites, contacts, whatever can be used to rally people to react, if not respond, to some injustice when the latter warrants resistance? Yes, many letters will seem with hindsight to be unworthy of being spread, but others may be the tonic we need. If you gagged on your morning (or later-in-the-day) coffee when reading or hearing some problematic news, write and speak up. And if those controlling the media won’t provide you with a platform, do it yourself.

In this regard, what follows is a recent letter to the *Globe and Mail* that they ignored but which may (with some minor edits to have it make sense now) yet have some interest.

In a [recent article](#) in the *Globe and Mail*, André Picard seems to see all who take a position about childhood vaccinations other than his as “anti-vaxxers.” However, there are many others — including, for example, health professionals who have taken part in CIHR- and SSHRC-funded empirical research carried out by Genevieve Rail (at Concordia) and Anne Taillefer (at UQAM) — who are neither in this “anti” camp nor with Picard as “Uber-vaxxers.” Rather, they and a range of those who have considered vaccinations and vaccination policies remind us of the many reasons for hesitation about giving and getting the ever-growing number of multiple childhood vaccines following rigid schedules for shots. As well, a close review of the existing literature reveals the persistence of many open questions about some of the vaccines packaged together for very young children that are also grounds for hesitation.

Nowhere in biomedicine are things ever simplistic; nowhere can they justify “do/don’t do” policies or “with me/against me” actions. Rather, hesitancy is often wise, and resisting the pressures of authorities and industry is usually a good thing when independent research findings and evidence-based decisions are still ahead. (A reminder of these pressures is apparent most recently in the failure of those developing guidelines to treat the overuse of opioid medications to reveal their multiple conflicts of interest and the debates about the impact of this lack of transparency on the guidelines.)

In advocating for some “national plan” for childhood vaccinations, Picard implies that the evidence is clear-cut. But is it really? The childhood vaccination rates for Québec and Canada are perhaps not only higher overall than he alleged, but in several countries (e.g., Great Britain, Italy, France, Germany) the rates may be even lower than here.

All (policies and rates) depend on just what is counted and one counts through one's perspective (unfortunately only called "bias" when resisters/opponents and the hesitant speak up).

The general message, then, for everyone getting their health news from the media: write, speak up, and rant when there's a problem, and if "they" won't publish you, maybe seek and then use other outlets. And if you, who are reading this here, have thoughts about letters to editors (and your own experiences to tell about) or want to react to the content of this specific letter, our postoffice boxes are open...

---

*Many thanks to Anne Taillefer and Genevieve Rail who signed the initial letter to the Globe with me, especially Anne for providing information on vaccination rates contained in her excellent PhD thesis research.*

---

Partager:



---

[← Eggspectations: A critical examination of the donation and 'social' freezing of eggs](#)

[A Procedure for Managing Conflict of Interest when Forming Thesis Juries →](#)

---

ISSN 1923-2799

