
Countdown to Character Assassination

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1990

Early in the 1990s Dr Wakefield's research into the causes of Crohn's disease, an inflammatory disease of the lower intestine, moved on to consider the possible role of wild or vaccine strain measles virus.

1990 – 1997

A number of patients presenting with a pervasive development disorder and gut problems were referred to the Royal Free Hospital. In most of the initial cases parents (or the child's GP) reported a temporal association between onset of symptoms and exposure to MMR vaccine. Wakefield and others were some of the first doctors in the country who sought to develop an understanding of the condition affecting these children. In these cases there appeared to be a possible link between measles virus, inflammatory bowel disease and autistic-like regression.

1998

Dr Wakefield and 12 other doctors and scientists at the Royal Free Hospital published an initial case series of 12 children in the Lancet. At a press conference following publication, Dr Wakefield suggested that it might be wise to return to single vaccines whilst research continued into the possible link between MMR, inflammatory bowel disease and autistic-like regression in a subset of children post-vaccination.

Following this statement, Dr Wakefield became the subject of an all out attack by the government, science lobbies and the pharmaceutical industry. Eventually his funding was withdrawn, his contract at the Royal Free was not renewed and he was forced to leave his post. These events prompted many people to further question the safety of the MMR vaccine.

2003

In 2003, Sunday Times journalist Brian Deer published a long 'expose' of Dr Wakefield, accusing him of a number of acts of professional, regulatory, ethical and legal misconduct. The article, which quoted a contribution from the Minister of Health, suggested that Dr Wakefield should be reported to the General Medical Council (GMC) of the UK. Following the article and a subsequent television programme, the GMC began framing charges against Dr Wakefield.

2007

After a three and a half year wait with the charges hanging over him, during which the government vaccine policy continued relatively unchanged and Dr Wakefield's public reputation was destroyed, he and two other doctors, Professor Walker-Smith and Professor Simon Murch were arraigned before the GMC panel on over 80 charges of professional misconduct. The hearing opened on July 16th 2007.

The GMC hearing is scheduled to last for three months.

2. The Indictment >>