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NO SIMPLE TOPIC

Vaccines and immunization procedures continue to befuddle BY GAIL O. GUTERL, EDITOR



● ● ● BEGINNING IN OCTOBER 2005, *ADVANCE* PUBLISHED a periodic series of articles on vaccines, written by nurses from the CDC National Immunization Program. The series, which has one more article to go, presented information on vaccine safety, flu vaccine, childhood immunizations, adolescent/young adult vaccines, and more.

We received a lot of comments from nurses about these articles. (To read the articles, visit www.advancetornurses.com/nurses and look for Online Extras; click on "Immunizations & Vaccinations" to lead you to the complete text.) Little did we know that for every technique of administration, for every type of vaccine, there are varying opinions on how it should be done or how safe it is.

Not Cut & Dried

In a conversation with one of the CDC nurse authors regarding a reader's question about a specific administration technique, she stressed the CDC recommends following guidelines formulated by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices.

"Some nurses have questioned ACIP recommendations for vaccine administration," the author mentioned. "ACIP recommendations are based on the best available scientific data. Regardless of the nurse's administration technique, the bottom line is that each vaccine should be given in a safe manner, at the correct dose, into the correct site, by the correct route."

So when a new book on vaccines came across my desk, I eagerly read it. I recommend it to all nurses interested in learning more about vaccines, their safety and the history of vaccine liability. *The Cutter Incident* by Paul A. Offit, MD, an infectious disease specialist at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, details the events surrounding production of the polio vaccine in 1955 that has had repercussions to this day regarding vaccine production and liability issues.

Basically, Cutter Laboratories, one of several authorized to produce the Salk vaccine in 1955 for mass distribution, had flaws in its production methods. Some batches of the killed-virus vaccine produced by this California laboratory had live polio virus, resulting in transmission of polio to many children. Numerous lawsuits resulted.

Do Your Own Research

Offit outlines the rippling effect the *Cutter incident* has had on vaccine production, but most notable is his caution to read deeper when one hears about a problem with any drug or vaccine. For example, according to Offit, a 1979 tabloid article stating that Bendectin, an anti-nausea drug used by women in early pregnancy, caused birth defects ultimately led to its removal from the market even though 27 separate studies showed it was not a teratogen.

Offit discusses many other issues impacting today's vaccines in his book, including the controversial preservative thimerosal, which many believe causes neurological damage. Offit explains why it is used and points out research doesn't support the contention that thimerosal is a problem in vaccines. In this age when so much information is coming at us from all angles, it is hard to know what is true, what is false, or even what is a gray area. Reading *The Cutter Incident* provides much food for thought on the numerous issues impacting vaccines today. ■

Gail O. Guterl