

I was a primary care pediatrician in Waterbury for over 35 years. Like my fellow pediatricians, my choice to specialize in Pediatric Medicine was driven by a deep desire to do everything possible to ensure the well being of children. Forty years later that desire is still at the core of everything I do.

There have been statements circulated that pediatricians conspire with insurance companies or pharmaceutical companies or someone else to harm children with immunizations. I can unequivocally state that this is not only completely untrue, but also highly offensive. These accusations are made without any evidence or proof and circulated in a way that they cannot be refuted.

Our professional body stated in 2016 that *"The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) supports regulations and laws requiring certification of immunization to attend child care and school as a sound means of providing a safe environment for attendees and employees of these settings. The AAP also supports medically indicated exemptions to specific immunizations as determined for each individual child. The AAP views nonmedical exemptions to school-required immunizations as inappropriate for individual, public health, and ethical reasons and advocates for their elimination."*

This policy statement is backed by diligent, thorough, and continuous investigation into the safety and effectiveness of immunizations. The evidence is indisputable when looked at in a rational, scientific manner.

As a scientist, I know that anecdotes are not evidence. But they can be powerful especially when told along with the hard, scientific evidence. I would like to share several personal stories about the importance of vaccines to me as a daughter, as a mother, and as a pediatrician.

The first is the story of my father. In 1949, as a young, decorated World War II veteran and a newlywed, he contracted polio. One morning he was unable to stand unassisted and soon was in an iron lung. I can only imagine the horror of the polio epidemics and the thousands who did not survive - 3000 children in 1952 alone. My father was one of the lucky ones - he survived, but not unscathed. I never saw my father walk normally and as he aged he lost more and more function, suffering horribly from post-polio syndrome. Now imagine how the news of the Salk and Sabin vaccines was heralded with joy and thankfulness for such a miraculous discovery. With the development and widespread use of these vaccines polio went from being a feared epidemic to a very rare disease in the United States. It is dangerous to forget the suffering caused by diseases that are now prevented by vaccines.

My second story is as a mother. My first child was born prematurely and was found to have congenital heart disease at 2 weeks of age. She was in severe heart failure at 5 weeks of age. The attempted treatments did not improve her condition and at 5

months of age, weighing less than 8 pounds, she underwent life saving open-heart surgery. She was incredibly vulnerable and probably would not have survived infection with whooping cough. The immunity from immunizations of those around her protected her from a life-threatening infection.

Finally, early in my first year of residency I was on overnight call with one senior resident when we admitted 5 young children to the ICU. They were all infected with *Haemophilus influenzae* type B, a bacterium infecting the epiglottis, and causing swelling that blocks the ability to breathe. That night alone we had 5 children who needed breathing tubes placed in their windpipes before they died of asphyxiation. These children all survived because of our intervention, but many others were not so fortunate. That was not the only night we had multiple admissions for this infection. But since the introduction of a vaccination in the late 1980's to prevent *Haemophilus influenzae* type B, epiglottitis is unheard of in immunized children.

As a pediatrician I have had the privilege of caring for thousands of children. I am a scientist. Scientists work to advance knowledge through unbiased, methodical, evidence-based processes. Science does not have all the answers. But the polio vaccine did answer the question "How can we stop this horrible disease?" for thousands of parents nearly 60 years ago.

Sadly, sometimes I have to give parents unwelcome news, but I have never had to tell a parent that their child had polio or smallpox or diphtheria. I no longer have to weep with parents who have lost a child to epiglottitis, measles encephalitis, or meningococcal or pneumococcal meningitis, because these diseases are preventable thanks to diligent research done for so long by so many scientists. I take my oath to "Do No Harm" very seriously. Vaccines save lives. This is an indisputable, unalterable fact despite the misinformation spread by a very small minority. We cannot leave vulnerable children in our schools unprotected against outbreaks.