

LETTER TO EDITOR (VIEWERS CHOICE)

VACCINATION: ADHERENCE AND CAREGIVERS OPINIONS OF A PRIMARY CARE FACILITY

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Vaccination stands as a pivotal milestone in medical history, allowing the prevention of a multitude of infectious diseases through national vaccination programs (NVP) and fostering herd immunity on a global scale.^{1,2,3} The roots of «anti-vaccine movements» trace back to the introduction of the smallpox vaccine in 1796.⁴ Vaccine hesitancy, as defined by the World Health Organization, involves delays or refusals of vaccination despite its availability and the provision of adequate services.⁵ Parents may reject vaccines due to the absence of prevalent diseases, leading to a misunderstanding of the actual risk.⁶ Additionally, anti-vaccination movements undermine the benefits of prophylaxis compared to potential iatrogenic risks.¹⁰ This resistance contributes to a decline in herd immunity, paving the way for infectious outbreaks once the epidemic threshold is breached.³

Combating vaccine refusal and hesitation is imperative to prevent the resurgence of preventable infectious diseases, posing a severe public health challenge. To delve into caregivers' perspectives on vaccination adherence, we conducted a cross-sectional study at a primary care unit, surveying caregivers through a convenience-based selection process in the first trimester of 2022. Statistical analysis considered a significant p-value of <0.05.

Out of 165 participants, an overwhelming 97.58% affirmed their child's full compliance with the NVP, 1.82% reported partial compliance and 0.61% indicated non-compliance, attributing it to "alternative medicine principles." Among those fully compliant, 155 adhered at the recommended age, while six experienced delays due to illness, pediatrician recommendations or reasons related to being abroad and/or emigrating. Of the three

children who partially complied, only one explained that the record of partial compliance was due to the absence of proof of a foreign vaccination record. The most frequent reason reported for adherence was "because I always believed in the benefits of vaccination"; followed by "on the advice of a health professional"; a minority indicated "because of reading information" and one person indicated "because I thought it was mandatory". More than half (65.45%) acknowledged that their child had received extra-plan vaccinations. Notably, a significant difference in adherence was observed concerning fathers with higher education and parents' education impacting compliance with extra-plan vaccinations.

The study underscores the significance of parental education and health literacy in promoting vaccine adherence. Existing literature emphasizes the pivotal role of trust between health professionals and caregivers in effective vaccine risk communication, especially within the pediatrician or family doctor relationship.^{6,7} Health professionals bear a crucial responsibility in promoting vaccination, dispelling doubts and mitigating vaccine hesitancy. Despite the undeniable efficacy of vaccination in saving lives and preventing illness, non-adherence has persisted throughout its history. Combating vaccine refusal and hesitation is vital to curb misinformation and its resultant public health implications. The study calls for further research to ascertain effective communication strategies with parents regarding vaccination, reinforcing the urgency of addressing this global health concern.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

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