

# Department of Research Abstracts

**PARENT PERSPECTIVES ON IMMUNIZATION MESSAGES** Linda Radecki, Lynn M. Olson, Mary Pat Frintner. Research, American Academy of Pediatrics, Elk Grove Village, IL. **Presented at the May 2009 Pediatric Academic Societies Annual Meeting.**

**BACKGROUND:** Amid increasing questions from parents regarding immunizations, pediatricians seek to best address families' information needs. Little is known about parent preferences for communication about immunizations.

**OBJECTIVE:** Obtain parent perspectives on vaccine promotion messages.

**DESIGN/METHODS:** We conducted 3 focus groups targeted to middle-class families. Parents of children  $\leq 36$  months were recruited through community flyers. Parents reviewed 5 messages; a standard list of questions elicited parent reactions. Sessions were recorded/transcribed to review key themes. Based on primary theme conveyed, we categorized messages as *scientific* or *emotional*.

**RESULTS:** Sample: 23 mothers, 1 father; largely white (88%) and educated (88%  $\geq 4$ -yr degree). 50% first-time parents. All children had received some/all recommended vaccines, but many parents expressed concerns about safety and the schedule. Several delayed vaccines. Scientific messages: 2 statements addressed autism and vaccine overload. Parents valued emphasis on scientific studies but requested further supporting evidence. *"I want to know what those studies are. Where can I find them?...and why should I value those studies above others?" "...to me, facts are more important than emotions. I'd rather hear 'we did a study and this is what turned out'" "It doesn't give you 'why' - why is timing so important? I've never understood that"* Emotional messages: Generally, parents rejected perceived fear or guilt to promote immunizations. Statements encouraging vaccines to prevent illness or death were largely viewed as inappropriate. *"...it was alarmist and negative, that might turn people off." "...messages about kids should be more positive..."* Parents valued messages that created a personal connection and facilitated discussion. *"...makes you feel like you and your pediatrician make the decision." "...I think this opens up communication with your doctor" "Maybe it needs something in there...'Talk to your doctor about making the choice that's right for your child.'"*

**CONCLUSIONS:** Messages that lacked substantive/scientific explanation or evoked fear or guilt were generally not endorsed. Participants sought messages that respect them as parents and acknowledge concerns in a nonthreatening way. Results suggest that families value messages that provide explanation from trusted sources. While most US parents opt to vaccinate, many likely have questions and concerns. Understanding and responding to their perspectives is critical to assure public trust and support for immunizations.

