

The National Vaccine Information Center (NVIC), An Ally for Freedom of Choice

The National Vaccine Information Center (NVIC) has been a consumer voice for freedom of choice on the vaccination issue. Barbara Loe Fisher and her colleague, Kathi Williams, have been seen and heard at many chiropractic events over the past years. The organization they founded, the NVIC is supported by many chiropractors who have a similar passion for this subject.

The ICA was the first national chiropractic organization to pass a policy statement on the subject of vaccinations. The statement reads:

The International Chiropractors Association recognizes that the use of vaccines is not without risk, and questions the wisdom of mass vaccination programs. Chiropractic principles favor the enhancement of natural



Barbara Loe Fisher

immunity over artificial immunizations.

The ICA supports each individual's right to select his or her own health care and to be made aware of the possible adverse effects of vaccines upon a human body. In accordance with such principles and based upon the individual's right to freedom of choice, the ICA is opposed to compulsory programs which infringe upon such rights.

The International Chiropractors Association is supportive of a conscience clause or waiver in compulsory vaccination laws, providing an elective course of action for all regarding immunization, thereby allowing patients freedom of choice in matters affecting their bodies and health.

The following is an interview conducted by Dr. Robert Braile, ICA Chairman of the Board with Barbara Loe Fisher, president of the National Vaccine Information Center which gives some idea of the extent of their work and how they have been fighting for parents and the health/lives of their children for the past 20 years.

BRAILE: First of all, on behalf of the ICA and all chiropractors, let me thank you for your courage and stance on an issue important and of significance to many chiropractors.

FISHER: Kathi and I feel privileged to have met and worked with so many chiropractors who have the courage to stand with us and defend the right to freedom of choice in health care, which includes the freedom to make informed, voluntary decisions about vaccination.

BRAILE: How did you both get involved with the issue of vaccination? And how did the NVIC come into existence?

FISHER: Kathi and I met in April 1982 after we both had watched the Emmy award winning TV documentary "DPT: Vaccine Roulette," which was produced by Lea Thompson, now the consumer health reporter for "Dateline." That documentary, which focused on the dangers of the DPT vaccine, was the first time American parents were told that vaccines could injure and kill. As we were watching that show in our separate homes, both Kathi and I realized that our sons had had severe neurological reactions to their fourth DPT shots. We both contacted the television station so we could network with other parents and that is how we met. Kathi and I and another Washington, D.C. area parent, Jeff Schwarz, were the three most active founders of the national non-profit organization we created and originally called Dissatisfied Parents Together (DPT) because one of our first goals was to get the whole cell pertussis ("P" part of the DPT shot) vaccine off the market. The mission we chose is to prevent vaccine injuries and deaths through public education and that is what our work has focused on for the past 20 years.

As we look back, I think there are several important early milestones that were instrumental in helping us achieve our mission. The first was the publishing of the book *DPT: A Shot in the Dark* by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich in 1985, which I co-authored with medical historian Harris Coulter, Ph.D., and was the

first well documented critique of the mass vaccination system. The second was enactment of the National Childhood Vaccine Injury Act in 1986, which was the first societal acknowledgement that vaccine injuries and deaths are real. We worked for five years with Congress to make that happen. The third was the day in 1993 in Boston that we were introduced to the world of chiropractic by the late, great Larry Webster, D.C., the grandfather of pediatric chiropractic.

BRAILE: I have heard you say that chiropractic has played a large part in the past survival of your organization. Can you give us a little history on the relationship between the NVIC and the chiropractic profession?

FISHER: When Larry Webster invited me to speak to about 200 chiropractors specializing in the care of children in the spring of 1993, Kathi and I had already decided to close the National Vaccine Information Center. We and the parents of vaccine injured children we worked with were very demoralized from so many years of fighting the wealthy and powerful alliance of big drug companies, government health agencies and medical organizations determined to silence our voice. There was only \$2,000 left in the organization's bank account. I didn't really know anything about doctors of chiropractic when I flew to Boston but, because I felt there was nothing left to lose, I decided to forget about being politically correct and just tell the truth as I saw it. Little did I know that chiropractors were pioneers in the fight for freedom of choice in health care and old veterans at battling the very same powerful alliance opposing us. Not only did I get a standing ovation after I spoke, which brought me to tears, but I flew back to Washington, D.C. with \$8,000 in donations, which was enough to convince Kathi and I not to shut down the organization. More importantly, we realized that we could tell the truth without being afraid. Soon after I was invited to speak to New Beginnings Seminar in New Jersey and then Dynamic Essentials at Life College, where many of the leaders of principled chiropractic came up on the stage to show their support for our message of informed consent to medical care, including vaccination.

That was probably the biggest turning point in our history because we understood our fight was part of a larger fight for freedom of choice in health care that was being waged by a brave and outspoken segment of the profes-

sional health care community. Because of both the tangible and moral support of doctors of chiropractic, NVIC did not just survive but our lifesaving message now reaches hundreds of thousands of people every year through our award winning website, publications, media relations program, local and state parent networks and other public information outreach efforts.

BRAILE: There are some groups in the chiropractic profession who say that chiropractors should give up their traditional opposition to compulsory vaccinations in order to be accepted into the "Main Stream" of health care. What would be your response to this type of thinking?

FISHER: D. D. Palmer once said, "Compulsory vaccination is an outrage and a gross interference with the liberty of the people in a land of freedom." That was a true statement when he made it in 1910 and it is true today. It is a big mistake to think that if you compromise on something as fundamental as freedom of choice in vaccination that you will buy acceptance from those who are trying to take away freedom of choice in health care. So I agree with BJ Palmer who said, "Conditions change, and our attitude towards them has changed, but principles remain the same."

BRAILE: In your years with the NVIC and the fight for this issue, what would you say were your highest and lowest points or times?

FISHER: Well, certainly, the lowest point in our history was when we almost gave up in 1993. But there have been enough wins and signs that have given us hope and encouragement along the way to keep our faith strong that we are supposed to continue to do this work, that is the right thing to do. It was a milestone for us in 1995, when the organization was financially stable enough that I could join Kathi in the office as a fulltime working President. In 1996, when the FDA finally licensed a less toxic pertussis vaccine after we had worked for 14 years to get the highly toxic old whole cell pertussis vaccine off the market, we felt we had accomplished something important. In 1997 and 2000 when we were able to hold the First and Second International Public Conferences on Vaccination and bring together distinguished scientists and health care professionals from the US, Canada and Europe, who were brave enough to stand up and challenge

the status quo, we knew we were making progress. Our Third International Public Conference on Vaccination is being held November 7-9, 2002 and we know it will be another milestone in our continuing mission to prevent vaccine injuries and deaths and defend the informed consent ethic.

BRAILE: What do you see as the biggest threat to freedom of choice on the vaccination issue at present?

FISHER: There is no question that, right now, the fear and hysteria that is being whipped up by politicians and public health officials about bioterrorism in the aftermath of September 11 is paving the way for a serious threat to informed consent to vaccination. The passage of oppressive Emergency Health Powers Acts in the states will allow public health officials to use the state militia to arrest, quarantine and forcibly medicate and vaccinate citizens without their consent. It gives unprecedented power to public health officials who, in some states, will not even have to have a state of emergency declared by the Governor in order to detain and forcibly vaccinate whole families without a court order if they so choose. It is the most serious threat to civil liberties since the Constitution was written and NVIC has joined with a politically diverse coalition here in Washington, D.C. to try to work in states to oppose the passage of this kind of legislation, which was funded and drafted by the Centers for Disease Control with the help of lawyers and public health departments at Georgetown and Johns Hopkins Universities. Once the precedent has been set that this kind of human rights abuse is acceptable in the name of disease control and protecting the public health, there could well be a fallout on current mandatory vaccination laws and the more zealous enforcement of them. So I am very concerned at this point in time that we are facing a huge public relations and legal battle to preserve what few informed consent rights we have right now when it comes to mass vaccination.

BRAILE: Can you tell us of any exciting and positive developments that are taking place in this fight for freedom?

FISHER: Before September 11, we were making headway on the informed consent issue in the states. In 1999, NVIC parents had the support of Texas chiropractors when we came very close