ANH International
The Atrium, Curtis Road
Dorking, Surrey RH4 1XA
United Kingdom
e: info@anhinternational.org
t: +44 (0)1306 646 600
f: +44 (0)1306 646 552
www.anhinternational.org

ANH-Intl Regional Offices
EUROPE anh-europe.org
USA anh-usa.org

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The Editor
The Guardian

Dear Editor

We were surprised at your lack of attention to detail in your report about HPV vaccines (HPV infection rates plummet after vaccine with China the next frontier, 4 Sept). You state that the newly published review led by Prof Suzanne Garland in Australia following 10 years of use of HPV vaccines "found that more than 187m doses of the vaccine had been administered in 129 countries, leading to significant declines in HPV." Actually the report confined itself to studies from just 9 countries and simply made reference to the fact that over 205 doses of the one type of HPV vaccine (4vHPV) had been administered to-date.

We also consider it a matter of public interest that the review in question that all 14 co-authors had fully declared conflicts of interest given their close association with the vaccine manufacturers Merck or Sanofi Pasteur. It appears as if the reporter failed to look at the paper itself and penned the story using only secondary sources so that the your end-product suffered the consequences of 'Chinese whispers'.

As a non-profit representing those wishing to make informed choices about healthcare, we were concerned about the significant deficiencies in objective science in the original review, about which we have posted a report on our website on 7 Sept (anhinternational.org). This was made worse by misrepresentations by the media, including the Guardian, which subsequently communicated Prof Garland et al's findings presumably based largely on a Merck-approved press release and secondary sources. This situation is unfortunately all too common and we believe it reflects a degree of cronyism that has crept into the scientific and medical establishments, which in turn is communicated unchallenged and in its distorted form direct to the public.

It is a travesty that children a young as 11 —along with their parents — are not given sufficient information to make informed decisions. As a society, we have been coaxed into trusting everything doctors and scientists tell us, even if it is overt hogwash.

Parental communication is known to be one of the most powerful influences on the age of sexual debut and subsequent promiscuity, two factors most directly linked to transmission of HPV. Probably because it is seen as something of a taboo since HPV's main risk is among ones so young — but also because there is so much money to be made — HPV has managed to escape being categorised alongside other common sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) like chlamydia, gonorrhea and genital herpes.

Our belief is that major health authorities are a very long way from providing a balanced view of both the benefits and risks of the HPV vaccine, especially to very young children, under the age of 12. Even more troubling, nothing like enough information is given to parents and children as to what can be done to minimise their risk of HPV-related cancers should they choose to not be vaccinated. Let the process of re-education begin — and let's get back to the real-world, not Prof Garland et al's (un)"real-world" as seen through the lens of Merck and Sanofi-Pasteur.

Yours Sincerely,

Robert Verkerk PhD

Scientific & Executive Director
Alliance of Natural Health International