

Elizabeth Hart
Adelaide, South Australia
eliz.hart25@gmail.com

For the attention of: Dr David Tovey
Editor in Chief, *The Cochrane Library*, and Deputy Chief Executive Officer
Cochrane Editorial Unit / Cochrane Central Executive

16 December 2014

David, further to our previous email correspondence re the systematic review prepared by Tom Jefferson et al, i.e. [Adverse events after immunisation with aluminium-containing DTP vaccines: systematic review of the evidence](#), published in *The Lancet Infectious Diseases* in February 2004.¹ (Also refer to my letters to Peter Gøtzsche, dated [8 July 2014](#) and [17 July 2014](#).)

The Cochrane Collaboration has hitherto refused to address my concerns about this review prepared by members of the Cochrane Vaccines Field. You have fobbed me off to *The Lancet Infectious Diseases* journal which has not acknowledged or responded to [my letter dated 11 August 2014](#) requesting they take urgent action to re-evaluate this review, a poor quality review which in my opinion should be retracted.

In their review on vaccine safety and aluminium Jefferson et al state: “We found no evidence that aluminium salts in vaccines cause any serious or long-lasting adverse events. Despite a lack of good-quality evidence we do not recommend that any further research on this topic is undertaken.”²

It is a matter for concern that this poorly evidenced review prepared by members of the Cochrane Vaccines Field has been used to categorically promote the safety of aluminium-adjuvanted vaccines. For example, an article about the review, titled “[Aluminium in Vaccines Poses No Harm](#)”³, published on the industry-sponsored website *WebMD*⁴ in January 2004, states: “After scouring through all the available medical data, researchers in Rome say there is no evidence that aluminium – contained within the combined diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis vaccine commonly known as DTP and routinely given to children – poses any serious or long-term side effects.”

In the article Paul Offit, arguably the vaccine industry’s foremost vaccine product promoter⁵, lauds Jefferson et al’s review on vaccine safety and aluminium as “a very thorough, thoughtful review of the subject...”⁶. Tom Jefferson is reported as saying: “Scare stories on aluminium-containing vaccines are not supported by evidence”.⁷

Yet only a year or so previously, in an interview with *The Telegraph* (published in October 2002) titled “[Vaccines expert warns studies are useless](#)”, Tom Jefferson candidly stated: “Most safety studies on childhood vaccines have not been conducted thoroughly enough to tell whether the jabs cause side effects” and the information available on the safety of vaccines that are routinely given to babies and toddlers was “simply inadequate”.⁸

It is bizarre that Dr Jefferson did a backflip on his publicly doubtful attitude towards vaccine safety studies just a year or so later in his 2004 Cochrane Vaccines Field review on vaccine safety and aluminium, and in his comments on the industry-sponsored website *WebMD*.⁹

The review on vaccine safety and aluminium prepared by members of the Cochrane Vaccines Field, i.e. Jefferson et al, is self-admittedly based on studies that were of overall low methodological quality.¹⁰ It is also notable that this review by members of the Cochrane Vaccines Field is not freely accessible, being located [behind the paywall on The Lancet Infectious Diseases website](#).¹¹ These lapses in quality of evidence and accessibility are at odds with The Cochrane Collaboration’s declaration that “our mission is to promote evidence-informed health decision-making by producing high-quality, relevant, accessible systematic reviews and other synthesised research evidence”.¹²

As the review in question was published under the auspices of the *Cochrane* Vaccines Field, and is listed in the [Cochrane Vaccines Field bibliography](#)¹³, I again request that The Cochrane Collaboration address the matter of this poorly evidenced review and the implications it has for international vaccination policy and practice, particularly in helping to facilitate the proliferation of aluminium-containing vaccine products, and potential over-vaccination of children and adults.¹⁴

I request your early response on this matter.

Yours sincerely
Elizabeth Hart
<http://over-vaccination.net/>

References: (All links accessible as at 16 December 2014.)

¹ Jefferson T, Rudin M, Di Pietrantonio C. Adverse events after immunisation with aluminium-containing DTP vaccines: systematic review of the evidence. *Lancet Infect Dis*. 2004 Feb; 4(2):84-90:

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1473309904009272> This review is also listed in the Cochrane Vaccines Field Bibliography: <http://vaccinesfield.cochrane.org/bibliography-2003>

² *Ibid.*

³ Sid Kirchheimer. Aluminium in Vaccines Poses No Harm. **WebMD** News Archive, 29 January 2004:

<http://www.webmd.com/parenting/news/20040129/aluminum-in-vaccines-poses-no-harm>

⁴ **WebMD** is an industry-sponsored website: <http://www.webmd.com/about-webmd-policies/about-our-sponsors?ss=fr> I suggest visitors to the **WebMD** website should remain wary of industry bias in its articles.

⁵ Paul Offit “*perhaps the most widely-quoted defender of vaccine safety*” also “*has strong industry ties. In fact, he’s a vaccine industry insider*”. Sharyl Attkisson. How Independent Are Vaccine Defenders? *CBS*, 25 July 2008:

<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/how-independent-are-vaccine-defenders/>

⁶ *Op cit.* [Aluminium in Vaccines Poses No Harm.](#)

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Lorraine Fraser. Vaccines expert warns studies are useless. *The Telegraph*, 27 October 2002:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1411417/Vaccines-expert-warns-studies-are-useless.html>

In this article Tom Jefferson also states: “***There is some good research, but it is overwhelmed by the bad. The public has been let down because the proper studies have not been done.***” Dr Jefferson is also reportedly concerned because future vaccination programmes were likely to involve giving children “***five, six, even seven vaccines all at once***”. Dr Jefferson said: “***For people like me, it is becoming more and more difficult to tease out what problems may be due to an individual vaccine...It is almost becoming impossible to do this. We have to think very carefully about how we will monitor these vaccines...We have a responsibility to these children – they are our future. It is no use having a situation where someone suggests a possible harm and everyone runs around frantically trying to find bits of evidence. What is required is good-quality information that has been systematically collated and assessed.***”

⁹ **WebMD** is an industry-sponsored website: <http://www.webmd.com/about-webmd-policies/about-our-sponsors?ss=fr> I suggest visitors to the **WebMD** website should remain wary of industry bias in its articles.

¹⁰ In their review on vaccine safety and aluminium, Jefferson et al admit that: “***Overall, the methodological quality of included studies was low***” and “***The results of our review should be interpreted within the limited quantity and quality of available evidence***”. *Op cit.* [Jefferson et al](#)

¹¹ *The Lancet Infectious Diseases* website notes: “***To read this article in full you will need to make a payment.***” The purchase price for the article is \$31.50 USD: [http://www.thelancet.com/journals/laninf/article/PIIS1473-3099\(04\)00927-2/abstract](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/laninf/article/PIIS1473-3099(04)00927-2/abstract)

¹² The Cochrane Collaboration – About us: “***Our mission is to promote evidence-informed health decision-making by producing high-quality, relevant, accessible systematic reviews and other synthesised research evidence. Our work is internationally recognised as the benchmark for high quality information about the effectiveness of health care.***” <http://www.cochrane.org/about-us>

¹³ Cochrane Vaccines Field Bibliography: <http://vaccinesfield.cochrane.org/bibliography-2003>

¹⁴ As discussed in my letters to Peter Gøtzsche dated [8 July 2014](#) and [17 July 2014](#), and my letter to John McConnell, *The Lancet Infectious Diseases*, dated [11 August 2014](#).