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UK panel rules against doctor over vaccine

Physician's research led many families to forego MMR shot

The Associated Press

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LONDON - A British doctor who claimed links between a common children's vaccine and autism failed in his duties and acted against the interest of the children in his care, a medical panel ruled Thursday.

The General Medical Council ruling against Dr. Andrew Wakefield regarded research that he and other doctors conducted in the late 1990s, purporting to show that the combined measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) injection could put children at risk of autism or bowel disease.

That research, published in The Lancet medical journal in 1998, and media coverage of it that followed, led many parents in the U.K. to refuse to vaccinate their children with the injection, which is administered around the world.

Ten of the study's 13 authors have since renounced its conclusions. The Lancet said it should not have published the study and that Wakefield's links to litigation against the manufacturers of the MMR vaccine were a "fatal conflict of interest."

In its ruling, the disciplinary panel concluded that Wakefield acted dishonestly and was misleading in the way he described the study. It said he should have disclosed that he was paid to advise lawyers acting for parents who believed their children had been harmed by the vaccine.

The General Medical Council also said that he and two other authors of the paper performed unnecessary medical operations on children and took samples from them without ethical approval.

The council said that Wakefield took blood samples from children at his son's birthday party, paying them 5 pounds each for their contributions and later

joking about the incident.

The panel "found that you caused blood to be taken in an inappropriate social setting and you showed a callous disregard for the distress and pain you knew or ought to have known the children involved might suffer," said Dr. Surendra Kumar, the panel's chairman.

Wakefield, who faces being struck off Britain's medical register, denied all charges Thursday. He and the two other doctors will be further investigated by the panel about whether the allegations against them amounted to serious professional misconduct and whether they should be allowed to practice in the U.K.

"I am extremely disappointed by the outcome of today's proceedings," Wakefield told reporters. "The allegations against me and my colleagues are both unfounded and unjust."

Numerous studies have concluded that there is no link between the MMR vaccine and autism or bowel

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