

## Pediatrics Reflection Project

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One of the most memorable parts of my pediatrics rotation, was when I had a 30-minute long conversation with the father of one of my patients. I was trying to convince the father that his child needed a flu vaccine. The reason I was so adamant was because my patient was hospitalized for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time in 3 years due to rhabdomyolysis directly due to a viral myositis from influenza. He likely had a metabolic disorder that we worked up (results were pending last I heard), that would cause an extremely bad reaction to the flu. Despite having a nearly life-threatening reaction to the flu, the parents refused to immunize their child with the flu vaccine. Their reasons were ill-informed and misguided, yet despite all reasoning and logic, they refused to give him the flu shot. They stated that even if he gets the flu shot, he is still susceptible to the flu. Although this is true, they did not seem to care that he would be at a lower likelihood of developing the flu if he was immunized against it. Another argument they used was that neither the parents, or their parents ever got a flu shot, and none of them ever fell ill with the flu. I tried to convince the father that although this may be true, it is certainly not the case for their child, who had confirmed influenza A documented on multiple occasions, with a subsequent viral myositis and rhabdo. I was advocating for the patient's safety, since it was clear that he was having an extremely adverse reaction from the flu, and there was a very simple and straightforward solution to preventing his illness. Unfortunately, even after numerous attempts on the part of myself, the residents, and the attending, the parents emphatically refused. My attending mentioned that if another episode of rhabdo secondary to the flu occurs, it may be reportable to CPS and I believe that parents should face ramifications for willingly endangering their child in such a clear-cut case as this one.

On numerous other occasions in clinic and on the wards, I experienced anti-vaccine parents who consistently refused flu vaccines out of fears of autism, inefficacy, and making their child sick. I tried my best to convince the parents that vaccines are safe, efficacious, and do not cause autism. I believe that this is a public health problem that must be addressed at a national scale. I hope that one day, parents will be better informed of the safety and efficacy of vaccines, and will not endanger the lives of their own child due to a lack of knowledge or stern beliefs. Although I understand the fears the parents have, if coming down with the flu directly hurts their child, they should at least acknowledge that their child needs the flu vaccine in order to prevent further injury.

**Commented [JS1]:** It is so difficult in such circumstances to understand how parents could refuse a vaccine that would protect the health, wellbeing, and perhaps even life of their child.

**Commented [JS2]:** Regrettably, in these situations reason and logic do not seem very persuasive.

**Commented [JS3]:** Were you ever able to elicit their reasoning? What was their logic? (Even if it seems illogical and unreasonable to us, these parents are usually trying to protect their child). They must somehow feel that the flu vaccine is so dangerous that it is worth taking a chance.

**Commented [JS4]:** I wonder whether threatening parents with CPS had a positive effect on their decision-making. It is an understandable response, and perhaps even correct legally, but I fear it will just drive the parents underground.

**Commented [JS5]:** As you discovered, it can be very difficult to pry parents away from their beliefs, no matter how ill-informed. Counter-evidence must be presented very carefully, within the context of an assumption that the parents are doing the best they can to take good care of their child. Anti-vaccine parents are often very suspicious of physicians and the healthcare system in general, and easily feel judged and blamed. It is important to listen respectfully and try to find common ground. Unfortunately, this is often not possible.

**Commented [JS6R5]:**

**Commented [JS7]:** What makes this situation so challenging is that it is not simply a matter of "educating" patients, but of which sources of information parents trust.