

CURRENT TOPIC / AKTUELNA TEMA
INVITED COMMENTARY / KOMENTAR PO POZIVU**Anti-vaccinationists**

In Online First issue of the *Serbian Archives of Medicine*, Radovanović [1] reviewed the anti-vaccination movement in the Balkan region. The anti-vaccinationists in the region were especially active since the 1990s and their ability to spread misinformation about “harmful, toxic and lethal” effects of vaccines has increased in the past decade.

Although the anti-vaccination movement has been present since the first vaccines were introduced, little of the old quasi-arguments or statements about harmful effects of vaccines has changed. In the United Kingdom, the Vaccination Act of 1840 provided free vaccination for the poor and outlawed “inoculation,” which at that time meant “variolation,” inoculation of smallpox material [2]. The Vaccination Act of 1853 made vaccination compulsory for all infants in the first three months of life and made defaulting parents liable to a fine or imprisonment. However, the founding of Anti-Vaccination League in the same year provided the first established movement against immunization. Then, a large number of anti-vaccination tracts, books, and journals such as the *Anti-Vaccinator* (founded in 1869), the *National Anti-Compulsory Vaccination Reporter* (1874), and the *Vaccination Inquirer* (1879) were published [3]. As a consequence, the majority of the population began to refuse vaccination. In 1872, vaccination rates in Stockholm decreased to 40%, and in 1874 a major epidemic affected the city and led to widespread vaccination and an end to further epidemics. Anti-vaccination activities in the United States led to a decrease of immunization rates and subsequently to epidemics of small pox.

These 19th century readings can be easily compared with modern anti-vaccine web-based statements on the internet. Rogers and Pilgrim gave probably the best definition: anti-vaccination movement encompasses a wide range of individuals, from a few who express conspiracy theories, to educated, well informed consumers of health care, who often have a complex rationale for their beliefs, related to a “mixture of world views held about the environment, healing, holism... and a critical reading of the scientific and alternative literature” [4, 5].

In this issue, an author concluded that epidemics of vaccine-preventable disease will, at least temporarily, reduce the influence of the anti-vaccination movement on the general population [1].

Today, the key role against anti-vaccination is played by the primary-care pediatrician, who can reassure parents that vaccines are safe and effective, and that usual adverse events are mild/transient and common, while serious events are extremely rare (e.g. anaphylaxis after immunization 1/1,000,000 of vaccine doses). Pediatricians could also reassure parents that almost all statements about vaccines found on the internet are not scientific or proved by medical, controlled studies. It may be useful to remind parents that stories of people whose children suffered serious diseases that could have been prevented by vaccination also exist on the internet.

Srđan Pašić

Professor of Pediatrics

“Dr Vukan Čupić” Institute for Health

Protection of Mother and Child of Serbia

University of Belgrade, School of Medicine

Serbia

**REFERENCES**

1. Radovanović Z. Anti-vaccinationists and their arguments in the Balkan countries that share the same language. *Srp Arh Celok Lek*. 2017; OnLine First: February 28, 2017; (00): 46–46. [DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2298/SARH161214046R>]
2. Wolfe RM, Sharp LK. Anti-vaccinationists past and present. *BMJ*. 2002; 325:430–2.
3. Porter D, Porter R. The politics of prevention: anti-vaccinationism and public health in nineteenth-century England. *Med Hist*. 1988; 32:231–52.
4. Nelson MC, Rogers J. The right to die? Anti-vaccination activity and the 1874 smallpox epidemic in Stockholm. *Soc Hist Med*. 1992; 5:369–88.
5. Rogers A, Pilgrim D. The pros and cons of immunization – paper one: immunisation and its discontents: an examination of dissent from the UK mass childhood immunisation programme. *Healthcare Analysis*. 1995; 3:99–107.

Примљено • Received:

February 2, 2017

Прихваћено • Accepted:

February 3, 2017

Online first: February 28, 2017