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Dr. Brian Ward
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Dear Dr. Ward:

I recently became aware that my work in the field of viral persistence is being quoted in support of the hypothesis that the measles virus component of the measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine is supposedly associated with the development of autistic spectrum disorder (ASD).

Measles virus has been a focus of my laboratory for many years so this autism/measles link has been of interest to me. Further, I should state up front that I see at present no evidence whatsoever for such a link.

In the early 2000s I was asked by Rick Rollens to consider a collaborative grant between my laboratory and that of Drs. Wakefield and O'Leary. Prior to making a decision, I decided to assess the performance of Dr. O'Leary's PCR-based assays targeting measles virus. My laboratory generated samples from tissue culture cells infected with MV as well as tissue samples from our transgenic mouse model of MV infection (including gut and brain tissues), which were coded and sent to the O'Leary laboratory. Samples had varying titers of measles virus as well as appropriate negative control and measles virus positive samples. The arrangement was informal in that the samples were only sent to Dr. O'Leary for testing. After receiving Dr. O'Leary's results, the code was broken and I discovered that approximately 20% of the samples were incorrect as to the presence or absence of measles virus. I reviewed the results with Dr. O'Leary as well as his protocols for preparing his assay, which I found to be sound and decided that perhaps there may have been some unknown error and a second set of samples should be sent. This second set was again coded anew and contained both new samples and several original samples. The results of the second round were no better with again approximately 20% of the samples misidentified by Dr. O'Leary's laboratory. Most troublesome, some samples, when tested twice under different code numbers 'switched' from positive to negative or from negative to positive. On this basis of inaccuracies of their PCR test, I declined from further working with either Drs. Wakefield or O'Leary.

Sincerely,

Michael B.A. Oldstone, M.D.
Head, Viral-Immunobiology Laboratory

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