

Vaccines Protect Children, Families, and the Community

By Dr. Jayesh Shah, 2016 BCMS President



A recent article in the *San Antonio Express-News* regarding the safety of vaccines for children has created a stir in our city. Parents naturally want to protect their children and keep them healthy. Vaccines were developed to protect children and adults from diseases that cause great pain and suffering, birth defects, and even death. However, when an illness or disability strikes a child, parents want answers and look for causes.

As physicians, we recognize the tremendous importance of vaccines. Vaccines keep our children and families healthy, prevent harmful communicable diseases, and protect our public's safety. We know that vaccines are incredibly effective. Widespread measles vaccination has led to an over 99% reduction in cases of this highly infectious and potentially life-threatening disease. Use of the whooping cough vaccine has resulted in a greater than 80% decrease in pertussis cases. Polio has nearly been entirely eradicated from our world. We also know that vaccines are safe. Research reported from trusted scientific bodies including the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, the Institute of Medicine, and the American Academy of Pediatrics proves this to be true. To be clear, there is no scientific link between vaccines, vaccine ingredients, vaccine schedules, and autism spectrum disorders. To state that a link exists is factually inaccurate.

San Antonio is an international city where the threat of infectious disease is ever present, therefore, it is con-

cerning that an elected official in Bexar County would promote inaccuracies regarding the safety of vaccines when, by so doing, he encourages parents to not vaccinate their children. Doing so may jeopardize the health and well-being of not only our young, but our aged, and medically fragile — those whose health may depend on the widespread use of vaccination.

Dealing with autism or any chronic medical condition in a family can be painful, and signing onto conspiracy theories can be tempting when parents seek answers. That said, Bexar County elected or appointed leaders should consult with the medical community and not appear to represent themselves as speaking on behalf of the city or county on such matters. Our county needs leadership to address the unique health challenges we face. Such leadership must have a clear understanding of the tenets of public health and prevention that keep our county healthy and safe. The widespread use of safe and effective vaccination is one such tenet.

The Op. Ed above, which was published in *San Antonio Express-News* on Wednesday, Sept. 7, 2016, was developed as a group effort with the Legislative/Socioeconomics, Public Health committee members, BCMS Executive committee and TMA. Special thank you to Mary Nava, Dr. John Nava, and Dr. Ryan Van Ramshorst for helping us formulate a quick response and opinion piece for the *San Antonio Express-News*.