

Guest comment

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Mandatory immunisation - is this your future?

by Hilary Butler



When Jenny Shipley 'flew her kite' about taking away the benefit from people who don't immunise their children, she also made two other things clear.

She said that the vast majority of people who don't immunise, can't be bothered, but that she was all in favour of keeping the freedom of choice for those who chose not to immunise.

This statement comes at a time when an 'expert' working party is developing New Zealand's immunisation

strategy to 1996, one of its first recommendations being an incentives or penalty system, to push up immunisation rates.

This would tie up closely with the British system, which gives doctors a 'lolly' of \$5,000 if their immunisation rate exceeds 90%. It also points the way to some compulsion being placed on New Zealand doctors, if they want to continue to receive the General Medical Benefit (GMB).

America now has one of the lowest immunisation rates in the western world, the trend against this practice stemming from a television documentary in 1982 entitled 'Vaccine Roulette'.

After this programme was shown a group called DPT (Dissatisfied Parents Together) was formed and a public awareness campaign began, to inform parents of the dangers of immunisation.

However, under the new Clinton administration, legislation is being introduced which will deprive parents of

any right to choose. A national tracking and surveillance system will be set up to oversee compulsory immunisation and force doctors to report parents who do not immunise their children.

The main pharmaceutical backer of this legislation is Lederle, which has at least another 12 vaccines that it would like to introduce before the year 2000.

The potential profits from the worldwide introduction of all these new vaccines are mind-boggling.

Not only in America, but also in Australia, public resistance to immunisation programmes is increasing, with many doctors also speaking out against the practice.

The information sector has now become extremely efficient and, as has occurred in America, the Australian Government has decided to counteract this by applying stringent conditions and penalties to families that do not immunise.

The implications for New Zealand are quite clear. Informed consent by parents and a goal of immunisation of all children are not compatible aims.

When informed consent becomes paramount, it will be impossible to achieve the desired objectives of the working party developing the National Immunisation Strategy.

The New Zealand Health Department believes that parents who decide not to immunise their children are making the wrong choice.

However, if too many people choose to select the 'wrong' option, I believe the American solution of incentives and penalties - and persuasion by force - will be introduced in this country.

But does anyone, other than myself, really care?