

# Study linking autism, child vaccine retracted

Wednesday, February 3, 2010 3:04 AM

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Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES -- Twelve years after Dr. Andrew Wakefield published his research in the international medical journal *The Lancet* purporting that the measles-mumps-rubella vaccine causes autism, the journal formally retracted the paper yesterday.

The action came less than a week after the U.K. General Medical Council's Fitness to Practice Panel concluded that Wakefield had provided false information in the report and acted with "callous disregard" for the children in the study. The council is considering whether Wakefield is guilty of serious professional misconduct. A positive finding could cause him to lose his medical practice.

Wakefield's study, conducted on only 12 children, concluded that the MMR vaccine was a primary cause of autism. He subsequently said that he could not, in good conscience, recommend that parents have their children vaccinated.

His words and actions led to a sharp drop in vaccination rates in Britain and the United States and a resurgence in measles. Despite subsequent studies that have refuted the link, vaccination rates have remained lower than they were before his report, and many parents remain concerned about the potential effects of the lifesaving vaccines.

"This will help to restore faith in this globally important vaccine and in the integrity of the scientific literature," Dr. Fiona Godlee, editor of the *BMJ* -- formerly the *British Medical Journal* -- said yesterday.

On Monday, Godlee had joined the chorus of scientists urging *The Lancet* to withdraw the paper.

The original report "was outrageous," said Dr. Jeffrey Boscamp of the Hackensack University Medical Center in New Jersey. "Most of the authors asked for their names to be removed from the study. It's unfortunate that it undermined confidence in vaccines when in fact it wasn't true at all."

Wakefield now oversees the research program at Thoughtful House, a treatment center for children with developmental disorders, in Austin, Texas.

"The allegations against me and against my colleagues are both unfounded and unjust, and I invite anyone to examine the contents of these proceedings and come to their own conclusion," Wakefield said in a statement provided by Thoughtful House yesterday.

*Information from Bloomberg News was included in this story.*