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Challenges and opportunities of communicating vaccine safety in developing countries

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Statement of the Problem: Immunization has been recognized as one of the most cost-effective public health intervention which has led to decreased burden of infectious diseases leading to improved life expectancy, decreased mortality and morbidity globally but less so in developing countries. The decrease in infectious diseases and their negative effects has led to public complacency and questioning the need for further immunization of children and raised concerns about vaccine safety.

Purpose: Aim of this study is to describe some of the challenges and opportunities to communicate vaccine safety in developing countries.

Methods: Literature review and observation.

Results: There is a widening gap in access to vaccines between developed and developing countries. Successful immunizations programs depend to large extent on the immunization acceptance. One of the factors leading to low immunization coverage rates in developing countries is concern about vaccine safety which may be real but often perceived. Effective vaccine safety communication is important in ensuring vaccine acceptance and improved immunization coverage in developing countries (Fig.1). Key challenges in communicating vaccine safety in developing countries includes: Illiteracy, limited access to information, multiple ethnic groups with many languages, poor health and other infrastructure, negative cultural and religious beliefs, inadequate social mobilization, inadequate number of health workers, inadequate knowledge and skills and poor motivation of health workers, negative and inaccurate messaging, vaccine hesitancy, inadequate funding and political interference. The major opportunities to enhance vaccine safety communication includes: Strong donor support, availability of administrative, political, cultural structures at national, and community levels; existing community and non-government organizations and growing print and electronic media.

Conclusion & Recommendations: Communicating vaccine safety in developing countries needs to be strengthened by addressing cultural, political, infrastructure, knowledge and skill gaps; and dispelling negative messaging. This process can tap into existing opportunities at international, national and community levels.

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