THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION ON IMMUNISATION SAFETY

Dragoslav Popovic, UNICEF Geneva
THE PROBLEM

- Vaccines are one of public health’s greatest successes - and one of its least heralded
- Appreciated within the field
- Taken for granted by a complacent majority
- Attacked and questioned by a vocal minority
- Needs new champions
ISSUES

■ New antigens, new technology, new costs
■ Less visible threats of some diseases
■ New threats, new competing priorities
■ Increasing portfolio of vaccine options
■ Stronger rights-based, “right to know” environment - growing civil society demands on access to information
ISSUES ctd...

- Increased and more rapid communication channels
- Previously locally isolated adverse events now national/international media events
- More frequent global travel, more exposure/understanding of different languages
- Less-government controlled and more global and commercially driven media
LESS PUBLIC TRUST

- Publicly available information on vaccines is confusing
- Confusing information creates more public questioning
- Politically, economically, ethnically and socially marginalised groups have less trust in government provided commodities/services - increasing rumors due to lack of trust in the provider
WHY DOES PUBLIC TRUST MATTER TODAY?

- Routine immunization is routinely at risk!
- Campaigns, introduction of new antigens/technologies are highly visible and increase possibility of adverse events and rumors
- Controversial stories have clear ability to attract attention
- Rumors and distrust can hamper our efforts
Adopted from Chen T, et al.
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II. increasing coverage
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IV. resumption of public trust

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Crisis communication
Need advance (evidence based) communication with media, community, political leaders.
“MINIMUM RESPONSE”

- Addressing rumors and misinformation (understand and address source of distrust)
- Managing AEFI **promptly** to minimize possible negative media reports (even before an investigation is complete a holding statement is important)

If there is silence, the public will come to their own conclusion!
Scientists must take care not to treat fear and reservation as ignorance and then try to destroy them with a blunt “rational” instrument.

Pattison – BMJ 2001;323:838-840
The careful and prompt management of adverse events following immunization is critical to public trust in vaccines, trust in the health system, and trust in international organizations and vaccine suppliers.