

A TRIBUTE TO THE PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD)

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As a disclaimer, I state that while the factual basis for this post is not fictional, I have used poetic license to change some of the circumstances in order to protect the identity of child victims and their families. Notwithstanding that fact, what I write in this post are very real scenarios that some parents deal with on a daily (and nightly) basis.

I have personal experience with what may be several vaccine injured children and their families. While I was studying for my Master's Degree in Criminal Justice and teaching at Rutgers University for a few years, I was also able to spend a lot of time with my children and other families. I saw an alarming number of ASD children and their parents struggling to cope with this disorder.

Currently, 1 in 68 children in the United States are on the Autism Spectrum (1 in 45 in New Jersey, according to the CDC). The following is a quote from CNN regarding a recent report from the CDC which was released in March 2014, "One in 68 U.S. children has an autism spectrum disorder (ASD), a 30% increase from 1 in 88 two years ago."

These statistics beg the question: with the addition of more administered vaccines promoting health, why are our children the sickest generation in history? Undoubtedly, there is a correlation between vaccines and autism. Note, a correlation does not mean that vaccines necessarily cause autism, however the two occurrences are existing simultaneously. Similarly phrased, there are more

vaccines than ever before and there is more autism than ever before. There is also an unprecedented number of children who have allergies, ADHD, seizure disorders and autoimmune disorders, with no family histories to link causation to heredity.

For many years, the vaccine “debate” has raged, with proponents and skeptics going head to head on the issue of whether vaccines cause autism. As an attorney, I have an insatiable desire to learn, and have questioned everyone I could regarding their position on this topic. I have asked occupational therapists, pediatricians, ER doctors and staff, nurses, teachers, neurologists, social workers, school administrators, grandparents, and moms and dads their views on this subject. The opinions are very diverse regarding whether vaccines cause Autism. I have heard many theories of causation such as, the environment, disposable diapers, non-organic foods, antibiotics, flame-retardant pajamas, flu vaccines during pregnancy, time spent in computer clusters, the water, the soil, pesticides, BPAs, food dyes, mold, and too much television and use of electronics.

I have also heard that the reason for the apparent rise in ASD diagnoses is due to greater awareness that has led simply to a higher number of diagnoses by medical professionals. Conversely, not all doctors subscribe to the “updated diagnosis theory.” Many of these doctors are in the trenches of this Disorder and have pediatric neurology practices full of mostly ASD children. One pediatric neurologist told me that she doesn’t care what the diagnosis is, or if there even is a diagnosis. She sees what she sees in her office, which appears to run the gamut of Autism on the spectrum. Another neurologist told me that it must be the environment that is causing brain damage. Yet another neurologist told me that he wholeheartedly believes that the autistic children suffered encephalopathy as an infant as a direct result of receiving vaccines and those children are now brain damaged (on levels ranging from mild to severe).

I have asked several pediatricians their thoughts as well. Most of the pediatricians stand behind the medical community regarding the need for vaccines and accept of the risk of “rare” injuries. For this reason, skeptical and concerned parents who want to slow down the vaccination schedule or who have questioned the efficacy and dangers of vaccines have been ostracized and treated harshly by their pediatricians.

A mom told me that her pediatrician went so far as to try to scare her into getting her child vaccinated by saying her baby could die if she doesn’t vaccinate. When she refused to vaccinate her child that day, the pediatrician made the mother sign a waiver of liability right in the examination room while holding her baby. I have heard about mothers who chose to slow the vaccine schedule down and receive less shots per visit, who were subsequently ostracized by that pediatric group with staff “losing the patient file” and causing the mother and infant, wearing just a diaper, to wait in the examination room for over an hour.

Regardless of the doctors’ opinions, whether in favor of or against a parent’s decisions, what exists is the upset that parents of ASD children endure on a daily basis. I have too often seen the emotionally-shattered looking mom pushing her child on a swing while she stares off into the woods behind him, probably busy blaming herself, her doctors and her husband, alternately, for putting her and her child in this terrible situation that she sees no way out of. Not even able to enjoy the respite of her temporarily quiet and occupied four-year old.

She might wonder what caused her child to have these neurological difficulties. She asks herself, was it the flu vaccine that I was bullied into getting while I was pregnant? Should I have blended all of my baby’s food, instead of feeding him jarred food? Maybe it was those diapers? Should I have breastfed longer to help better develop the neurological pathways as an infant? Should I have refused that second DTaP vaccine after he screamed for three days straight and then developed a low-grade fever that lasted two months after the last DTaP shot?

Her gaze and worry and fear only broken by the sound of a cooperative little voice of a “neurologically typical” 5 year old child responding “ok, mommy” when her mother says it’s time to leave the park. Uh-oh, she says to herself, as she is ripped

away from her obsessing and catapulted into reality. The reality called “time to get her son off the swing to leave the park.” She knows this will be a battle on many fronts that could last an hour. She decides to prepare herself and her son for the imminent transition that is one of the biggest triggers of her son’s screaming and thrashing fits. What will happen this time? Her infinite optimism enables her to hope for the best. She thinks to herself, please just this one time make it easy. No such luck. She will have to ride this tantrum out. Again.

Most of us moms have seen these mothers on the playground. Some of whom try to “play it cool” and attribute their child’s screaming to a poor night’s sleep. Other moms who just refuse to socialize probably due to emotional exhaustion and let’s not forget, physical exhaustion because her son was awake on and off all night (in and out of her bed) with sleep disturbances that are par for the course with “spectrumy” kids. The moms of typical children probably feel many different feelings when they see these other moms, but of all the emotions that overtake them, I would imagine it’s the feeling of helplessness.

The problem is that there are far too many situations like this today. I know a mom whose life is practically ruined and her marriage destroyed because all she wanted as an adult was to have a daughter who she could play with, partially a wish to make right her mother’s failures when she was a child. That parent lives in an emotional state of torment with feelings that oscillate between sadness, anger and blame, like a tumultuous tornado, on a daily basis.

A dad, with whom I spoke, told me that his child flies into states of aggressive and violent outbursts and property destruction in his home, alternating with crying fits on the floor that last 45 minutes.

The vaccine-autism debate is still ongoing. The Vaccine Court has been helpful in its attempt to handle vaccine injury cases by allowing access to the law and justice. I have faith in the Judicial System and in the Vaccine Court. However, Autism is not one of the listed injuries on the Vaccine Injury Table, thereby making it more difficult to recover damages for ASD allegedly caused by vaccines. Despite that fact, some people have recovered millions of dollars after proving that their child suffered encephalopathy which subsequently caused their

previously typical child to become autistic. These cases settled, which means the Department of Health and Human Services (the Respondent) has conceded that the vaccines caused an encephalitic reaction, which in turn caused Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Until this epidemic is better understood amongst the legal and medical communities, these families need support: emotional, physical and sometimes, financial. They do not need to feel judged or feel that their extended family and friends believe their child is spoiled or a behavior problem. Rather, they need love, encouragement and understanding. These families are consumed by this Disorder that can be overwhelming on many levels for each of the family members, including siblings.

So, Next time you see a screaming kid who won't leave the park, give the parents the benefit of the doubt. Maybe unbeknownst to you, that child is on the Autism Spectrum. Err on the side of caution and compassion and extend something as simple as a smile or a pat on the back as you walk by. It will make a difference in that parent's life even for a moment and let them know that they are not alone in their moments of despair.

I am a Vaccine Injury attorney, admitted to practice in the United States Court of Federal Claims, where vaccine injury cases are filed. For more information, visit my website, www.widmanlawfirm.com. We are available 24/7 by phone and online. If you believe you or a loved one was injured by a vaccine, note that there are strict statutes of limitations (time bar) on filing a claim, so do not delay in contacting a vaccine injury attorney for a case evaluation.