

AIDS 'rumour' came from doctors

Sir,

It has been suggested to me that I was the author of the rumour that the hepatitis B vaccine is contaminated with the HI virus.

However, this 'rumour' was not started by myself, but by a drug company man on radio, and two Wellington GPs. The latter placed a public notice in the *Dominion* to the effect that they could not guarantee their patients would not get AIDS from this vaccine.

There is no evidence in medical literature to suggest that this vaccine contains HIV but the recent Viewpoint in the *Franklin County News* gives the impression that the vaccine has been well-tested amongst overseas health workers. This is grossly misleading as in the last six years, only five million doses of this vaccine have been used.

In the USA, where this vaccine is made, many hospitals offered it free to all health workers at risk, but only 10% accepted it. Some cited fear of AIDS, others fear of as-yet-identified viruses.

Even though New Zealand health professionals are being urged to get vaccinated because of 'epidemic' rates

of hepatitis B in hospitals, they are opting to pay their own way and have the yeast-based vaccine. The Wellington Area Health Board has done the same.

Government can settle the issue for parents once and for all. I challenge them to issue a public statement, guaranteeing that this vaccine is 100% safe, contains neither the AIDS virus nor any other as yet unidentified viruses. Furthermore, should they be proved wrong and our children suffer long-term effects, they will promise to pay not only medical costs and life-long care for these children, but also compensation.

Since they are so sure of their choice, such a step should be a cinch, shouldn't it?

Hilary Butler TUAKAU

Editors note:

Dr Allan Cowan, spokesman for the South Auckland Health Development Unit, confirms that Hilary Butler did not start the rumour.

"In fact, it was triggered by Smith, Klein and French NZ Ltd, makers of the yeast based vaccine," he says.

In that company's brochure to doctors, advocating the use of this product, it states: 'Under safety it (the yeast vaccine) does not

share the theoretical risk of infection when associated with plasma derived vaccine.'

The company has since stated that it did not mean to infer there was an Aids risk in the other vaccine, but it would appear the damage has been done by implication.

Dr Cowan advises that Government has already issued a statement guaranteeing the safety of the vaccine and feels 'it goes without saying' that the good health of all New Zealanders is the concern of the Health Department.

His reaction to Mrs Butler's statement that 'only five million doses have been used' was one of amazement, and he wonders how much

research would satisfy her. He stresses that the American Federal Drug Administration, which carried out tests on the vaccine is an 'extremely careful licensor.'

As an example of this he pointed out that, when thalidomide was being used in Great Britain and New Zealand, someone at FDA 'had a feeling about the drug' and did not allow it to be used in America.

Dr Cowan emphasises that the vaccine Hepatitis B is not made from a virus but from a fraction of one. The vaccine is then put through three sterilisation processes and many tests.

"I hope my grandchildren are being immunised," he says.