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LETTERS

A JAB IN THE DARK

JCVI processes are at least as robust as those of scientific journals

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Hawkes proposes that the evidence on which the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) bases its decisions should be placed on a website.¹ He also suggests that not to do so can only be due to academic vanity. However, academics are now judged and rewarded on the basis of their publications in peer reviewed journals with high impact, so this goes beyond vanity. If the committee did as suggested it would rapidly have few scientists willing to subject their evidence to the committee before publication. The alternatives of waiting for publication before making a decision or not considering unpublished evidence make for bad decisions or cost lives through delays in implementing cost effective vaccinations.

The crucial pieces of unpublished evidence that influence the committee's decisions are all subject to peer review and response before they come to the committee. The committee also requires full declarations of conflict of interest from the scientists involved. These processes are at least as robust as those of scientific journals.

Hawkes also bases his assumptions about extending flu vaccination on evidence he has not seen that the decision was based solely on herd immunity resulting from vaccinating children and adolescents. This is incorrect. The evidence showed that direct protection was cost effective.

Inaccurate and irresponsible journalism has been the main cause of underperforming vaccination in the UK over the past 50 years (measles and autism; diphtheria, pertussis, and tetanus and encephalopathy) and the resultant deaths.

Competing interests: AJH chairs the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation.

1 Hawkes N. A jab in the dark. *BMJ* 2012;345:e5313. (8 August.)

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