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Chapter 7

Communicating with parents

7.1 Objectives

- To understand where parents get information in relation to immunisation
- To understand the importance of communicating effectively with parents about vaccination
- To understand how to deal with clients that default from the immunisation programme.

7.2 Where do parents get information in relation to immunisation?

Parents obtain information about immunisation from a variety of sources including

- Health care professionals: Hospital nurses and doctors, general practitioners, practice nurses, public health doctors and public health nurses and community mothers
- Family and friends and spouse/partner
- Leaflets
- Media/Newspapers /Radio/Television/Internet.

The decision of a parent to get their child vaccinated can be influenced by a number of factors including

- Personal experience, attitudes and beliefs
- Healthcare Professionals
- Knowledge of disease
- Family and friends
- Media (newspapers, magazines, television, internet).

7.3 Communicating effectively with parents

It is essential that the interaction between health care professionals and the parent/guardian is effective. The quality of communication will determine whether the parent/guardian will understand the advice given and thus be able to make a fully informed decision. The interaction between the health care professional and the parent/guardian might determine if the parent will return for vaccination.

For this interaction to be effective parent/guardian should be

- Treated with respect and courtesy
- Given practical clear advice about
 - Vaccines- what they are and how they work
 - Diseases that vaccines prevent
 - What common side effects occur post vaccination and how to treat them
 - The risks of not vaccinating
- Given information that is culturally acceptable and which is understood by the parent/guardian
- Given time to reflect on the process and ask any questions that they might have.

Any decisions that are made, whether to give or withhold vaccines must be respected.

The healthcare professional must be open and honest about known adverse effects of the vaccine and place in a meaningful context e.g. compare risk from vaccine with risks from everyday activities and also compare risks of vaccinating versus not vaccinating e.g. compare risk from vaccine with risk from disease.

The healthcare professional needs to

- Be competent in the safe administration of vaccines
- Have evidence-based knowledge of the benefits and risks of vaccination or not vaccinating
- Be confident, empathetic and consistent
- Afford sufficient time to answering questions from parents/guardians and allaying fears
- Know when and where to refer for further information
- Emphasise that **lives saved** by vaccination may more effective in promoting vaccination than discussing **lives lost** through not vaccinating (Appendix 8).
- Recognise factors affecting an individuals' decision making and explore any specific concerns
- Communicate existing knowledge taking into account what individual already knows
- Provide written information and recommend other reliable sources of information
- Provide parents with language-appropriate vaccine information leaflets at a timely interval prior to vaccination.

It is vital that vaccinators are able to respond to parental concerns and correct misconceptions about diseases and vaccines

7.4 Dealing with defaulters

Some people for whatever reason default from the vaccination programme. There is no one simple mechanism to deal with defaulters. Dealing with defaulters requires a considerable workload input from the general practitioner, practice nurse and public health nurse. Opportunistic vaccination should be encouraged even if the client is over the recommended age. Up-to-date immunisation information should be available where parents might have an opportunity to access them including general practitioner surgeries, HSE Health centres, playschools etc. Some groups may need to be targeted specifically to get their children immunised. This might include groups who have language or literacy difficulties or have difficulty accessing the health services.

7.5 Useful resources

American Academy of Paediatrics. 2006 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases –The Red Book <http://aapredbook.aappublications.org/>

Bedford H, Lansley Information on childhood immunisation: parents' views. *Community Pract* 2006 Aug; 79(8):252-5

Bedford H, Eliman D, Concerns about immunisation. *BMJ* 2000 (320) 240-243

Department of Health UK. November 2006. Immunisation against infectious disease. http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Policyandguidance/Healthandsocialcaretopics/Greenbook/DH_4097254

Health Protection Surveillance Centre, Ireland. www.hpsc.ie

National Immunisation Office. Health Service Executive. <http://www.immunisation.ie>.

Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation UK <http://www.advisorybodies.doh.gov.uk/jcvi/>

Royal College of Physicians of Ireland. Immunisation Guidelines for Ireland. Available at www.hpsc.ie

World Health Organisation: Geneva 1997. Global Programme for Vaccines and Immunization-Expanded Programme on Immunisation. How to communicate with mothers.

