



Resolution 5: Addressing Vaccine Hesitancy

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Conflict of Interest: No known conflict of interest

WHEREAS there is a lack of credible information to foster vaccine acceptance and the importance of vaccinations in preventing diseases and protecting health for parents/legal guardians, who are responsible for making informed decisions to immunize their children.

WHEREAS registered nurses (RNs) are the most trusted health care professionals and can therefore play a significant role in providing accurate health information regarding vaccination, which supports informed decision-making by parents/legal guardians to immunize their children, thereby increasing immunization rates across the province of Ontario and contributing to the health protection of all Ontarians.

WHEREAS RNs need evidence-based knowledge and resources to counsel parents/legal guardians on vaccine hesitancy and misinformation

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO) develops a plan to support RNs and NPs to promote the importance of vaccines, vaccination, and addressing vaccine hesitancy amongst health professionals.

Background

Vaccination has a significant contribution to prevent and control infectious diseases in Canada and internationally (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2019). Most parents or legal guardians choose to have their children vaccinated, yet some are hesitant to vaccinate their children. The World Health Organization (WHO) Strategic Advisory Group of Experts (SAGE) Working Group on vaccine hesitancy defines vaccine hesitancy as a "delay in acceptance or refusal of safe vaccines despite availability of vaccination services" (2014). In Canada, an estimated 20% of parents are vaccine hesitant, and are unsure about the safety and effectiveness of vaccines (Dubé, Bettinger, Fisher, Naus, Mahmud, & Hilderman, 2016). In addition, non-medical exemptions for vaccination continue to increase, contributing to vaccine preventable outbreaks (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2019).

The reasons parents or legal guardians are vaccine-hesitant include: lack of confidence in vaccine effectiveness, safety and potential side effects of the vaccine, perceived low risk of acquiring vaccine preventable diseases (VPDs), lack of convenience to access immunization

services, and the influence of family opinions and beliefs (SAGE, 2014). According to recent Canadian surveys, 70% of parents were concerned about potential side effects of vaccines and 38% believed that a vaccine could cause the disease that it was intended to prevent. Of Canadian parents whose children were not immunized, 28% perceived low risk of acquiring VPDs, 17% had concerns regarding vaccine safety, and 12% were concerned about the perceived number of side effects (Dubé, et al., 2016; Shen & Dubey, 2019). In addition, the Internet and social media have been major platforms in spreading misinformation about vaccines and have contributed greatly to vaccine hesitancy (Danielson, Marcs, & Boyle, 2019).

Despite the influence from the media, parents/legal guardians still rely on health care providers for information and advice about vaccines. Registered nurses (RNs) remain the most trusted health care professionals for credible sources of information on vaccination by parents (Stephenson, 2019). RNs often provide the initial response to counsel parents who express vaccine hesitancy; therefore, it is important to provide nurses with evidence-based knowledge and resources to counsel parents/legal guardians on vaccine hesitancy and misinformation. The development of a best practice guideline to address vaccine hesitancy and misinformation would provide RNs with a standard to guide their practice in promoting vaccine acceptance (Toronto Public Health, 2019).

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