

HEALTH & WELLNESS

Healthbeat

Study: No link between measles vaccine and autism

WASHINGTON (AP) — New research further debunks any link between measles vaccine and autism, work that comes as the nation is experiencing a surge in measles cases fueled by children left unvaccinated.

Years of research with the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine, better known as MMR, have concluded that it doesn't cause autism. Still, some parents' fears persist, in part because of one 1998 British study that linked the vaccine with a subgroup of autistic children who also have serious gastrointestinal problems. That study reported that measles virus was lingering in the children's bowels.

Only now have researchers rigorously retested that finding, taking samples of youngsters' intestines to hunt for signs of virus with the most modern genetic technology. There is no evidence that MMR plays any role, the international team — which included researchers who first raised the issue — reported recently.

"Although in fact there was evidence that this vaccine was safe in the bulk of the population, it had not been previously assessed with respect to kids with autism and GI complaints," said Dr. W. Ian Lipkin of Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons, who led the work published in PLoS One, the online journal of the Public Library of Science.

"We are confident there is no link between MMR and autism," Lipkin said.

Added co-author Dr. Larry Pickering of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: "I feel very certain that it is a safe vaccine."

Measles, a highly infectious virus best known for its red skin rash, once routinely sickened thousands of children a year and killed hundreds, until childhood vaccinations made it a rarity in this country.



Lipkin

UNC spin-off company gets grant to market cancer treatment

A University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill spin-off company has been awarded a \$2 million grant to commercialize a new technology to improve radiation treatment of prostate cancer.

The grant from the National Cancer Institute, as part of its Small Business Innovation Research program, will enable Morphormics Inc. to market its proprietary technology for rapidly constructing anatomical "roadmaps" of individual patients.

"These roadmaps are critical navigational aids that help physicians keep a radiation beam focused on the tumor, while at the same time avoiding nearby parts of the body that could be harmed by radiation exposure," said Edward L. Chaney, Ph.D., Morphormics' vice president of technology, professor in the School of Medicine's department of radiation oncology, and member of the UNC Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center.

As part of pre-treatment planning, radiation oncologists build the three-dimensional anatomical roadmaps of their patients by excluding sensitive organs and other anatomical structures from the medical images that are used to guide treatment. Currently, the process for creating such maps is both time-consuming and expensive, Chaney said.

Morphormics, also known as Mx, was founded in 2001 by Chaney and fellow UNC professors Stephen M. Pizer, Ph.D., Kenan Professor in the departments of computer science and radiation oncology, and Sarang Joshi, D.Sc., who at the time was an assistant professor at UNC and is now at the University of Utah.

Kids encouraged to enter 'Go Healthy' contest

In celebration of Go Healthy Month, the American Heart Association's Alliance for a Healthier Generation program is encouraging all children in the Triad to participate in the first ever "Go Healthy Contest!"

The contest is in response to the nation's growing childhood obesity epidemic. More than 12 million children in the United States are overweight with another 12 million at risk of becoming overweight. High cholesterol, high blood pressure, and abnormally thick heart muscle tissue coupled with the 70 percent chance of overweight children becoming overweight adults welcomes a tremendous risk of heart disease into our children's future.

Children from age four to 17 should write two or three paragraphs about how they plan to become healthier and why it is important to them. More information and writing tips are available at www.americanheart.org/GoHealthyContest. Parents may help younger children complete their entry. Entries will be accepted through Sept. 23.

A boy and girl from five different age categories will be selected by a judging panel. These 10 local child winners will receive a three month family membership to their local YMCA. Winners will be announced on Saturday, Sept. 27, with a joint proclamation for Go Healthy Month being presented by Winston-Salem Mayor Allen Joines, Greensboro Mayor Yvonne Johnson and High Point Mayor Becky Smothers.



Mayor Johnson

FREE PROSTATE SCREENINGS OFFERED

Early detection can save lives

CHRONICLE STAFF REPORT

Free prostate screenings will be offered next week at the Downtown Health Plaza.

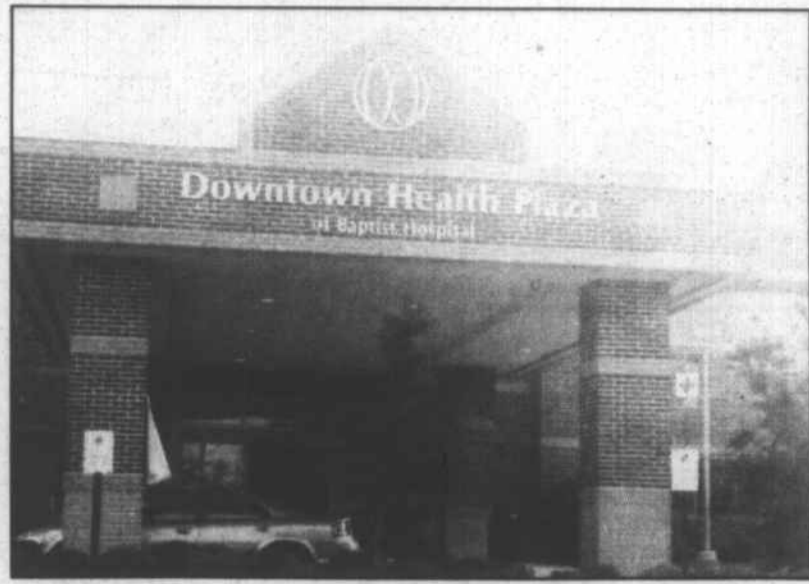
Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center is sponsoring screenings on Thursday, Sept. 18 and Saturday, Sept. 20 for men over 50 who haven't had a prostate exam in the last year and men over 40 who are African-American or have a family history of prostate cancer.

Screenings are vital for this type of cancer because early detection can mean the difference between life and death.

"With early detection, nine out of 10 men can beat prostate cancer," said Dr. Karim Kader, a Wake Forest Baptist urologist who is directing the screening.

The screenings will include a blood test for prostate cancer known as the prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test and a digital rectal exam to detect prostate abnormalities.

According to the National Cancer Institute, symptoms of advanced prostate cancer can be similar to enlarged prostate and can include difficulty urinating, frequent urination, weak flow of urine, urine flow that starts and stops, pain or burning during urination, blood in the urine or semen and difficulty having an erection. In early cases of



the disease, however, there are generally no symptoms.

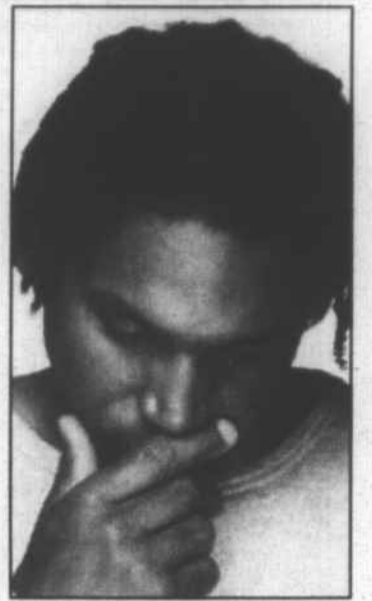
"The screening tests are important because they can detect the disease before symptoms develop," said Kader, an assistant professor of urology. He said about 90 percent of all prostate cancers are currently diagnosed at an early stage and men are surviving longer after diagnosis.

Prostate cancer is the third-leading cause of cancer deaths among men in the United States, according to the American Urological Association. It affects about 234,000

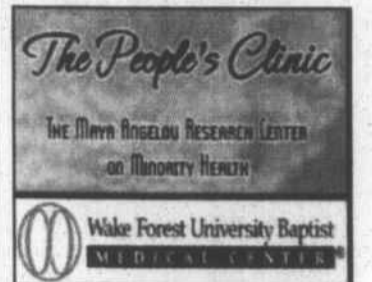
American men each year with approximately 27,000 of them dying each year.

Physicians from Wake Forest Baptist's Department of Urology will conduct the screenings from 6-8 p.m. on Sept. 18., by appointment only. Call 336-716-2255 to make an appointment. The Sept. 20 screenings, from 7-9 a.m., will be conducted on a walk-in basis.

The Downtown Health Plaza of Baptist Hospital is at 1200 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive.



Mental Health: An Introduction



There has been an increasing push in society toward becoming healthier; we all know, for instance, that the consequences of obesity, poor diet, and inactivity can be deadly. In our attempts at living healthier lifestyles, we must keep in mind that our mental health is equally as important.

Millions of people of all races and ethnic backgrounds in the United States live with conditions like depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, and obsessive-compulsive disorder. But how much do we really know about these conditions?

Unfortunately, people living with mental illness are frequently stigmatized and treated differently—even by those who mean well. Education is the first step toward addressing stigmatization and helping people who need treatment to seek it with confidence. To that end, the Maya Angelou Center has decided to dedicate a three-part article series to the discussion of mental health. This article will focus mainly on adult mental health.

What are some of the most well-known mental illnesses?

We have written articles on most of the well-known mental illnesses, including depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder. Briefly, here is a recap of a few mental illnesses:

Mood disorders. Mood disorders include depression and bipolar disorder. With depression, a person may experience prolonged "down" periods in which they may feel unusually sad or hopeless, lose interest in things that used to bring them pleasure, and have decreased energy. Suicidal ideation (thoughts of suicide) and is not uncommon among people with depression and can sometimes lead to suicide attempts. In bipolar disorder, people cycle back and forth between depression and mania, a "high" or "elevated" state of mind characterized by increased energy, racing thoughts, and impulsiveness. These are only a few symptoms of bipolar disorder and depression; your healthcare provider can provide you with more details, or you can call the Maya Angelou Center (number below) for more information.

Anxiety disorders. There are many types of anxiety disorders, including panic disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and social phobia. While we all experience anxiety in our daily lives (it's part of being human), for some people these feelings can become serious and debilitating. Each of these conditions has its own symptoms; however, the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) notes that "all the symptoms cluster around excessive, irrational fear and dread."

Schizophrenia. People living with schizophrenia frequently experience terrifying hallucinations, such as hearing or seeing

MEDICAL MYSTERY



American Dr. Anthony Gaspari with Dede, who is known throughout his native Indonesia as the "Treeman," ever since these bizarre growths began to cover his body. The Discovery Health channel is set to chronicle Gaspari's fight to save Dede's life and reclaim his body. "Treeman: Search for the Cure," will air Oct. 5 at 9 p.m.

Free drug samples cost in long run, Wake Forest study finds

CHRONICLE STAFF REPORT

Those free drug samples that we all get from our doctors may not end up being free after all.

A study involving researchers at Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center found that such samples, which are provided to physicians by pharmaceutical companies, may be costing uninsured patients more in the long run because when their samples run out and they have to buy the drug, often there is a much cheaper generic drug available.

The retrospective study looked at the prescribing habits of more than 70 physicians in a university-affiliated internal medicine practice in the months immediately before and after the closing of their drug sample closet. The complete findings can be found in the September issue of "Southern Medical Journal."

"It's true that samples can save patients money in the short-run," said David P. Miller, M.D., lead researcher and internal



medicine physician at Wake Forest Baptist. "But our study shows that they may end up paying more in the long run when they are given prescriptions for brand-name only drugs."

The study says that drug samples are available only for brand name drugs, which are often newer, more heavily advertised and almost always much more expensive than

generic drugs in the same class.

"The theory is that drug companies hand out samples because it gets physicians in the habit of using a drug and physicians, therefore, are more likely to prescribe that drug later," Miller said.

Many times, initially, a patient will be given a sample of a drug to test tolerability and effectiveness. Often times, when a physician gives a patient a sample, it is accompanied with a prescription to fill after the sample is gone. Sometimes free samples are used by physicians to help patients who cannot afford medications. But the availability of drug samples is not always predictable and, when patients return for refills and the samples they need are missing from a practice, either because the drug representative didn't leave enough or stopped distributing them altogether, patients who were started on brand name drugs in sample form are left paying the price when they have to fill a prescription.