6.5: How is the Anti-Vaccine Movement Gaining Traction?

Anti-vaccine activists are not concerned with the truth. They routinely twist facts and use false data to promote misinformation. But one of the most effective tools is the use of emotionally charged stories about children who have supposedly died or been irreparably harmed by vaccines. Most, if not all, of these stories are fabricated. For instance, the family of a Newfoundland girl who died of cancer discovered that their daughter’s image was being used on the social media page of an anti-vaccine group. The group falsely claimed the girl died as the result of vaccines.

While vaccines carry a risk of serious adverse events, including febrile seizure and cellulitis (less than two per million in 2017), according to Public Health Ontario (2018) the overall incidence of harm is small, particularly compared to the risks of contracting a vaccine-preventable illness. About one in 20 children with measles will develop pneumonia and about one in 1,000 will develop encephalitis—inflammation of the brain.

The use of personal stories is an effective response because they connect with people on an emotional level. Public health vaccination campaigns typically focus on the importance of immunization. Those messages are easily drowned out by the photo of a smiling young child depicted by anti-vaccine activists as a “victim” of vaccination. Video Clip 6.2 is an interview with Globe and Mail reporter, Carly Weeks, describing trends in vaccine hesitancy today.

Video Clip 6.2: Interview about Vaccine Hesitancy
A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/immunizations/?p=192