
Letters to the Editor

To the Editor:

MEDICC Review deserves accolades for presenting to the medical community information that has been poorly represented and even more poorly understood on the availability of meningococcal meningitis vaccines (Sotolongo F et al. Cuban Meningococcal BC Vaccine: Experiences & Contributions from 20 Years of Application. *MEDICC Review*, Fall 2007).

This lack of information is exemplified in a case report from Massachusetts General Hospital published in the June 21, 2007 issue of *The New England Journal of Medicine* (NEJM). In the final statement, the authors conclude: "vaccines against group B may lack immunogenicity or elicit immune reactions against self-antigens and potential immune injury. Therefore, currently available vaccines do not include group B antigens." [1]

This statement is at variance with research on meningococcal serogroup B vaccines and with the multi-country experience using the VA-MEN-GOC-BC vaccine produced by Cuba's Finlay Institute, the subject of the *MEDICC Review* article. The immunogenicity of serogroup B vaccines was validated, and concern over the potential for such vaccines to stimulate auto-antibody formation was put to rest by Stein et al who concluded that US clinical trials were warranted. [2] And as reported, international clinical trials of the Cuban vaccine estimate efficacy at over 70% in children ≥ 2 years.

Widespread information on this Cuban vaccine may be particularly scarce in the United States due to the embargo on Cuba, which also delayed application of promising Cuban vaccine technology in US clinical trials. [3,4] despite the fact that we are continually faced with outbreaks of group B meningitis. In my home state of Washington, there have been over 1,000 cases of meningococcal meningitis with over 100 deaths since the Cuban vaccine was developed; [5] increasingly, these are serogroup B infections similar to the outbreak in Fresno, California in March of this year. [6]

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Dr Robert Fortner is a nephrologist and Founding Board Member of the National Dialysis Council. In 2007 Dr Fortner published a three-part article on Cuban nephrology in *Nephrology News & Issues*.

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