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An open letter to Justin Timberlake

MEGAN BABB, MD | PHYSICIAN | JANUARY 13, 2016

While I recognize that I have a better chance of contracting dengue fever in my suburban city than there is of you actually reading this, I will try anyways. Here it goes.

My name is Megan. I am a family medicine doctor practicing in Northern California, and I love my job. I'm nothing fancy. I don't spend my day in the OR. I don't spend my day in the emergency room treating gunshot victims. I spend my day (my often 12 hour day) in a quiet office where I see 18 to 22 patients all with various complaints.



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Some have a cold. Some have abdominal pain. Occasionally one will come in with a complaint of chest pain that ends up being a heart attack. It won't be me that whisks them off to the cath lab for an angiogram with stent placement nor will it be me to perform an appendectomy if that patient with abdominal pain has an appendicitis — but that's OK because as I said above, while maybe not fancy, my job is important and here is why.

I recently heard that you and your wife have chosen not to vaccinate your precious baby. My first thought was why in the heck are they not vaccinating their child? Then my next thought was why in the heck am I hearing about your child's immunization status? Why does this become a social frenzy that is shared with the world? I mean I'm sure in a few years the world will not be hearing about whether or not you decide to get a colonoscopy. We probably also won't hear in a few years whether or not Jessica decides to get routine

mammograms and if she does, I doubt we will hear if she decides to start at 40 years old versus 45 years old or if those mammograms are going to be once a year or once every two years.

But when the world hears about your decision not to vaccinate, all it does is cause confusion in our society. All it does is make those who look up to you think this decision is the right one and in turn, follow suit. This, unfortunately, leads to the unnecessary spread of disease and illness. So if this information is, in fact, correct and you have decided not to vaccinate, if you can bear with me, I will tell you why I think this decision is actually not a good one.

Let me for one moment tell you about a patient. Imagine a middle aged female who we will call Jane. She goes to see the doctor with a complaint of nipple retraction. Fast forward three days and about 4 hours later, she is back sitting in another doctor's office being told that definitively from biopsy she has breast cancer and that this cancer has metastasized to nearby organs. She is now undergoing intense chemotherapy and has just undergone radical mastectomy and has lost both of her breasts. She is also a single mom who has kids. She still has to get up, get her kids ready for school, pack their lunch, drop them off, run her errands, pick her kids back up from school, make dinner, put the kids to bed, go to sleep, then repeat this all the next day and the day after that. She doesn't have the luxury to not be a mom while she is trying not to let cancer kick her ass.

The problem is, she can't avoid the public. She has to go to the store. She has to provide food for her children. She has to be around people. She has no choice. As a result, she has to rely on those in her community to be vaccinated because those who are vaccinated, help protect her as she fights what is likely the hardest fight of her life. A child who is not vaccinated against say measles, puts her life in danger. A child who isn't vaccinated against influenza also puts her life in danger. In fact, any unvaccinated individual, puts her life in danger.

You see, vaccinations don't just protect the individual, they protect the community. They protect vulnerable people like Jane. I understand that you (just like most other parents) are just trying to do what they feel is best for their child — I cannot fault you for that.

However, I implore you, do your research, educate yourself on the topic, and have an open discussion with your doctor. Listen to the medical community and trust that we know what we are doing. Trust that when we say vaccinations are safe, they are safe. I wouldn't trust us to write you Grammy award winning musical lyrics, but I would trust that after a minimum of 13 years of education, we doctors know a thing or two about medicine and at the end of the day, we all come from the best of intentions. This is why my job is important. I help protect your little one because I help educate the community that surrounds your little one — I encourage vaccination. So please, think about it. Vaccines, they aren't so bad. It's the diseases they protect us from that are. #TrustmeImadoctor.

Sincerely,

Megan Babb, MD

Megan Babb is a family physician.

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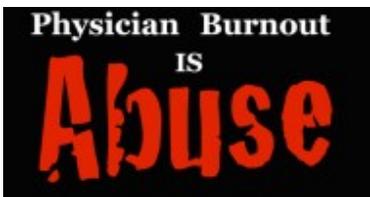
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