

★ **The Doctor Who Fooled the World: Science, Deception, and the War on Vaccines**

Brian Deer

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A gripping and timely work of investigative journalism, Brian Deer's *The Doctor Who Fooled the World* unveils the elaborate fraud perpetrated by Andrew Wakefield, the researcher who falsely linked the MMR vaccine to autism and contributed to a global panic regarding childhood immunizations.

The ruse can be traced to the 1980s when, over a pint of Guinness on a rainy night in Toronto, Wakefield speculated that inflammatory bowel disease was caused by viral-related damage. Wakefield knew his theory would be a profound medical breakthrough if proven, and so he marshaled every possible resource to attempt to do just that. Ultimately, he focused on a perceived link between exposure to the measles virus, Crohn's disease, and the onset of autism, and he identified the measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine as the culprit. However, as Deer reveals, Wakefield's entire case was based on a study involving just twelve children, all of whom were referred to him because some element of their history potentially reinforced his hypothesis.

A veteran British journalist, Deer has been on the front line investigating this scandal for more than a decade, and his book is captivating on many levels. It is a comprehensive review of Wakefield's dubious research methods and perpetual falsification and obfuscation of data to fit his theories. It explores the broad network of doctors, lawyers, investors, anti-vaccine crusaders, journalists, and celebrities whom Wakefield enlisted to perpetuate a myth which contributed to a significant decline in vaccination rates and, ultimately, a global resurgence of measles. It reveals how the charismatic Wakefield profited from his own deceptions, manipulating government agencies, medical journals, and broadcast and social media. And it tells the sad, compelling stories of the children who took part in Wakefield's research and their parents, who were desperate to explain and understand their children's disabilities.

At a time when the World Health Organization lists "vaccine hesitancy" as one of the top ten threats to global health, this stunning work sounds an urgent message and demonstrates the essential role of investigative journalism in uncovering the truth.

KRISTEN RABE (May / June 2020)

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