



Read our CEO **Jonny Wilkinson's** regular column in The Northern Advocate

"A different Light"

A Different Light 15 June 2019 – Your Best Shot

I went for my flu jab yesterday. I had been procrastinating. The feeble logic that flu vaccines give you the flu was vaguely in my psyche. The news that this year's increased demand for the flu vaccine has resulted in an early shortage across the country, prompted me to take action.

I am one of those ones who gets a free shot. I'm one of the ones whom Pharmac are advising should be prioritised due to the shortage. Old people, young people, pregnant woman and those with conditions such as asthma fall into this category. I went to the medical centre to witness people getting turned away for the vaccine. Apparently, it's a nasty strain this year. Over in Aussie 139 people have already died from it. One has to take it seriously!

I've had a checkered history with vaccinations. My father liked to relay this anecdote about when we were in transit from Fiji to England in the late 60s. We stopped off in Portugal, where there was a measles outbreak. At the airport anyone who had not been vaccinated was ordered to have one done there and then. I was three years old. My father objected strongly. He was still recovering from an incident in Fiji where I had bronchitis and a local doctor did a home visit (they did them back then). The doctor gave me a shot of penicillin. I had an immediate allergic reaction. Anaphylactic shock! I convulsed and stopped breathing. While the doctor was looking for adrenalin my father brought me back with mouth to mouth resuscitation and cardiac compressions. On the back of that Dad wasn't keen to see me getting a shot particularly not at a Portugal airport. The official replied to him, in a loud voice, that there were absolutely no exceptions. He then feigned giving me an injection with the needle barely touching my skin. My father was clearly impressed with the official taking the opportunity to use us as an example without following through. Old school style.

I'm not sure whether I had a lot of childhood vaccines. I got chicken pox when I was 30. I got it the day after going on my friend Greg's stag do. It was a two-day affair and no doubt my immune system was down. I got ridiculously crook. I had pox from head to toe, even on the palms of my hands. I looked hideous. I got encephalitis, I saw double for two weeks.

Vaccines are important and need to be taken seriously, particularly in Northland, where a total of nine people have contracted measles, with three new cases announced on Monday.

In this day and age we know that all health organisations, doctors, and scientists agree that vaccines are safe and effective and for the most part readily available. Despite this common knowledge an anti VAX movement is alive and kicking. Social media has played its part to fuel myths around this subject. My parent's reluctance to immunise me fifty years ago came from a rare life death near miss. Despite this I am still alive and kicking: vaccinate your kids and make sure they are too.

Jonny Wilkinson is the CEO of Tiaho Trust - Disability A Matter of Perception. A Whangarei based disability advocacy organisation.