



American Medical Women's Association
The Vision and Voice of Women in Medicine since 1915

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Casey Bloys
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Dear Mr. Bloys,

We, the undersigned members of the American Medical Women's Association, have concerns about the HBO show *Real Time with Bill Maher* spreading dangerous medical misinformation.

On the November 1, 2019 episode the first guest was Dr. Jay Gordon, who likes to go by the name "Dr. Jay." On his website, Dr. Jay states that he "advocates for a balanced, moderate view regarding vaccines," and describes himself as "a strong supporter of an individualized vaccine schedule that allows parents to make choices that are right for their families." However, Dr. Jay is known to be the pediatrician for the son of actress Jenny McCarthy, a well-known anti-vaccine advocate who claims that childhood vaccines cause autism, and has appeared with her at anti-vaccine rallies, giving speeches at these events himself.

The thirteen-minute segment featuring Dr. Jay was less an interview with Maher than a conversation of two like-minded individuals expressing conviction that to speak about the potential danger of vaccination is "courageous" and lamenting a culture that posits only "one true opinion" about medicine.

Maher has long been a critic of vaccination and medical science in general, usually without any valid data. In September 2009, at a time in the H1N1 (swine flu) pandemic when over 9,000 people in the U.S. had already been hospitalized, nearly 600 had died, and public health officials were working to convince people to get vaccinated, he told his Twitter followers that "If u get a swine flu shot ur an idiot." Healthcare writers and researchers in mass media outlets from *The New York Times* to *HuffPost* cautioned his fan base not to listen, due to the risk to their health. Maher was undeterred. In the October 9, 2009 episode of *Real Time*, he challenged former Senate Majority Leader Dr. Bill Frist on the science of vaccines, stating that he would never get a swine flu vaccine or any vaccine and denying the seriousness of H1N1 influenza, although Dr. Frist cited two recently published articles in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. Maher refused to believe the science. Dr. Frist stated that he was putting people in danger through the powerful platform HBO provided.

Maher is known for his prickly nature, but he provided no pushback to Dr. Jay in the November 1, 2019 show,

nor to anti-vaccination activist Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., who claims childhood vaccines cause autism, when he appeared on the show in April 2015. Dr. Jay is complicit in the spreading of misinformation by stating that he believes there is an impact of vaccines on the development of autism, although he can't prove it. Further, as a medical doctor practicing in teaching hospitals that train medical students and residents, he failed to correct Maher on his general misperceptions about science, for instance that we are "just at the beginning" of understanding how the human body works. Dr. Jay has been in practice for 42 years and graduated from a respected, accredited medical school. He has the capacity to explain how much knowledge physicians and scientists have about the human body.

In the Overtime segment, where guests answer questions submitted by viewers, Dr. Jay had only one question, which was about toxic materials in baby foods. He quickly segued from that topic to talk about new vaccine laws in California, where he practices, and other states that clamp down on nonmedical exemptions or bans them altogether, stating that this was an affront to parental rights and physician autonomy. He got only a smattering of applause, leading Maher to say with barely disguised contempt, looking out into the audience, "And the sheep not clapping."

Bill Maher has over 11 million Twitter followers and over 1.3 million viewers per episode. It is irresponsible for HBO to allow a comedian and political satirist to give medical advice based on personal belief and not science. Decades of research worldwide has shown that vaccines and the vaccine schedule recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Family Physicians, and the Centers for Disease Control are effective and safe. The World Health Organization listed influenza pandemics and vaccine hesitancy as two of the top ten threats to global health in 2019. Please make public health a priority.

Respectfully,



Roberta Gebhard, DO
AMWA President 2019-2020



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