



## Antivaccine advocates line up to support airman

Richard Cairney

A member of the Canadian air force who refused to take anthrax vaccine finds himself stuck squarely in the middle of 2 strongly opposing factions. On one side is the armed forces, which has launched court-martial proceedings against Sgt. Michael Kipling, and on the other is a small but vocal antivaccine lobby that praises him for taking his stand. The case has sparked a national debate over the military's use of vaccines.

Kipling, a flight engineer, faces charges because he refused to permit anthrax vaccination while serving in the Persian Gulf in 1998. The 26-year veteran tendered his resignation from the military last month.

He also served in the area during the Gulf war in 1991, after which he claims he became chronically ill with nonspecific illnesses that have since been dubbed Gulf war syndrome. With the aid of physicians, Kipling overcame the ailments, which he suspected were linked to vaccines and other preventive treatments he received in 1991. When he was called back to the region in 1998 he refused the anthrax vaccine, and in November court martial proceedings started. "I chose not to submit to this vaccine because I still believe there is a link between it, vaccines in general and the Gulf war syndrome."

His cause has been taken up by 2 Winnipeg lobby groups: the Eagle Foundation ([www.eaglefoundation.org](http://www.eaglefoundation.org)), an organization dedicated to educating the public about side effects associated with vaccines, and the Association for Vaccine Damaged Children.

These groups, along with American organizations such as the National Vaccine Information Centre ([www.909shot.com](http://www.909shot.com)), are at the centre of a new wave of distrust of vaccines, says Lieutenant-Colonel Greg Cook, the physician responsible for medical policy at the Department of National Defence. To combat this sentiment, "particularly as it relates to the anthrax vaccine," Cook finds himself referring more and more people to printed and electronic resources dealing with vaccine safety; these include a US Defense Department site on vaccine safety

— [www.defenselink.mil](http://www.defenselink.mil). As well, the Canadian Paediatric Society has published a thorough book on vaccines and side effects, *Your Child's Best Shot*, and Health Canada offers information, [www.hc-sc.gc.ca](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca).

Cook speaks contemptuously of the "unrelenting barrage" of negative press coverage the military has received over the anthrax vaccine. He said it was forces' policy to vaccinate everyone entering the Persian Gulf theatre because of fears that anthrax spores were in Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's arsenal of biological weapons.

Although civilian treatment is based on informed consent, military personnel need only be informed. They received information about the anthrax vaccine and were allowed to ask questions about it, Cook says, but that information was never intended to help soldiers decide if they *wanted* the shots. "You can't have informed consent . . . because these individuals have been ordered to take this vaccine. Consent doesn't come into it."

The consent issue may be the key to Kipling's defence, should the court martial continue. Kipling says military personnel shouldn't have fewer rights than the people they're protecting.

He says he wanted to stay and serve in the Gulf, and even offered to sign a waiver relieving the forces of responsibility for his refusal to take the vaccine.

"I am willing to die to protect the rights of Canadian citizens if my country asks me to. . . . I was in theatre asking to sign a waiver to stay in theatre. I'm not scared of dying because of the enemy — I'm just leery of having unproven and unlicensed vaccines given to me that might cause me harm in the future."

Defence Minister Art Eggleton responded by noting that he was vaccinated against anthrax during a recent visit to Kuwait and has never felt better. That carries little weight with Kipling — he says the minister's health is irrelevant to his case. "My faith in being taken care of by my government later on is not very strong," he says.



Sgt. Mike Kipling: "I'm leery"

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