

# Doctor didn't start out to be medical gadfly

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EL CERRITO — When Kevin C. Geraghty graduated from medical school he took a physician's oath: *Primum non nocere*. Above all do no harm.

That oath has come to have a powerful meaning in his life as the pediatrician and immunologist has battled for improved testing, labeling and quality of the pertussis vaccine.

Geraghty, 42, didn't start out to be a medical gadfly. He had a thriving immunology-allergy practice in El Cerrito, with a second office in Pinole. In 1982, he saw a television program called "DPT:

Vaccine Roulette," produced by WRC-TV in Washington, that pointed to an alarming number of severe reactions to the pertussis vaccine.

The program so upset Geraghty that he decided to do his own study. "I couldn't believe what they were saying — that the reactions were as common as they said and that the FDA tested every batch and rejected 30 percent.

"...I really set out to debunk the whole program — to prove that the medical profession wouldn't let something like this happen."

As he began his research, Geraghty said, his requests for scientific data were being denied. "That made me immediately suspicious, so I started going through the Freedom of information Act to get it."

Some pediatricians in his community alerted him to a high number of crib deaths (sudden infant death syndrome) and asked him to look into the situation. Three of those classified as crib deaths, he believes, instead were shock like deaths closely following DPT shots.

The findings unalterably changed the life of Kevin Geraghty and his family.

"I've been working on this a year and a half. I've spent \$80,000 I don't have. I've sold everything, hocked everything. We spent \$23,000 last year on postage." To his chagrin, he's gone back to chain smoking.

Geraghty cut his medical practice in half, took out a second mortgage on his home and continued working eight to 10 hours a day on pertussis vaccine. Eventually, he went through two rooms full of documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act.

The rooms contain hundreds of complaints from physicians to drug companies going back 30 years, microfilm containing thousands of adverse-reaction reports to the national Centers for Disease Control, copies of articles from medical journals on pertussis vaccine, and court depositions and documents obtained from the manufacturers and the Food and Drug Administration about laboratory tests on the vaccine.

Geraghty began writing papers about his findings and sending letters to anyone who might be able to help, including copies of key documents and always ending with a reminder: *Primum non nocere*. Above all do no harm.

As his suspicions mounted, Geraghty and nine other doctors formed the Bay Area Physicians for the Study of Pertussis Vaccines. They began approaching those in charge of the medical community.

"We had found irregularities in the UCLA study and I tried to tastefully convey that information to a member of the Red Book committee [American Academy of Pediatrics' Committee on Infectious Diseases] in October 1983, when they were here for a meeting," Geraghty said.

"I showed him some FDA documents that could be potentially embarrassing and this gentleman put his hands over his ears in the lobby of the San Francisco Hilton and walked away saying, 'I don't want to hear. I don't want to hear.'"

Finally, Geraghty began opening up to the news media.

"I didn't want to. It's not the way things are done in the medical field. But I had no choice, believing as I do that 100 babies a year are dying and 250 more are left brain-damaged.

"This crisis is ripping at the fabric of the integrity of medicine, but more importantly, it's ripping at the children."

In turning over documents to *The Bee*, Geraghty said: "Some of these are under gag order so that if I release them, I go to the pokey. The matter is important enough I would not let that stop me.

"There's a higher ethic I have to be responsible to — the babies."

Geraghty was jailed once before in 1975 for leading a strike at Cook County Hospital in Chicago "because we did not have the usual things necessary to save people's lives during a crisis.

"So you may hear people say I'm a heretic, anti-establishment, radical and, despite being a good Irish-Catholic, I'm sure they have called me a commie," Geraghty said.

"You have to balance that against the fact that I have... my boards from the American Academy of Pediatrics. I have my boards in allergy and immunology. I served four years with an honorable discharge as an Army sergeant. I have two kids.

"I'm president-elect of the Lung Association, I'm on the board of directors of the Epilepsy League and I was just elected to the board of directors at our hospital."

Geraghty graduated from the University of California, Berkeley, and State University of New York Health Sciences Center, Stony Brook; interned at Cook County Hospital in Chicago; and was awarded fellowships to the University of Chicago in immunology and cystic fibrosis and to the University of California, San Francisco, in allergy and immunology.

In May, he went to Washington to supply materials for Senate and House staffs researching the National Childhood Vaccine Injury Compensation Bill, SB 2117.

Dr. Salvatore Giuffre, former president of the Alameda-Contra Costa Counties Medical Association and former chief of staff at Brookside Hospital in San Pablo, has known Geraghty since he was "a bright young man" working as a laboratory technician.

Now, Giuffre said: "He's a hard-working doctor, very dedicated to helping people. I would not hesitate to recommend him as a man of the highest character."

"I am the voice of the practicing pediatrician in all this, but I've gone as far as I can go," Geraghty said. "I'm a clinician, not a researcher. I'm painfully aware of that. I want to get my life back to normal.

"My wife, Connie, has been more than understanding. . . And my own children have become victims of DPT in a different sense."

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