

The following is a letter sent to Simon Fraser University with regards to the university renting out room at its Harbour Centre campus to the Vaccine Resistance Movement for their “Vaccine Summit: Vancouver 2013”

CFI Vancouver has also sent out a press release, seen after the letter.

Andrew Petter, President and Vice-Chancellor
President’s Office
Simon Fraser University
8888 University Drive
Burnaby, British Columbia
Canada V5A 1S6

Dear President Petter,

We are deeply disappointed to see Simon Fraser University (SFU) lend its credibility to dangerous anti-vaccination propaganda by renting space to the upcoming “Vaccine Summit: Vancouver 2013” at SFU Harbour Centre.

University campuses are, and should be, venues for the free exchange of ideas. We recognize that one of your vital duties is to be a place where controversial ideas are allowed a fair hearing; but a university also has a duty to educate the public.

The “Vaccine Summit” is billed as a “transparent discussion about vaccines”. It actually promises to be nothing more than a platform for discredited scare-mongering about vaccination.

Vaccination is one of the most successful public health interventions of the modern world. The benefits of vaccinations are clear: smallpox has been eradicated, polio is on the verge of eradication, and infectious diseases that were endemic are now in retreat. Billions of lives have been saved because of vaccination. Vaccines are safe: the known minimum risks are greatly outweighed by the benefits.

This is not the message that the attendees at the “Vaccine Summit” will hear.

They can expect to be told that vaccines cause autism—despite this claim having been comprehensively refuted. (Andrew Wakefield, the champion of this claim, was found to have committed wilful research misconduct including falsification of data and misappropriation of funds. Wakefield was barred from medical practice in the UK, and his 1998 publication in *The Lancet* was retracted.)

They will be told that vaccines are dangerously toxic, and that unproven naturopathic and other alternative treatments are more effective.

Most tragically, they will be told to deny their children the protection provided by vaccines.

As misinformation has spread, vaccination rates have declined. Regionally-eliminated diseases, such as measles, are making a swift return to North America and Europe, including an outbreak of pertussis (“whooping cough”) here in Vancouver just last autumn. B.C. has also seen recent outbreaks of measles: in most cases, directly attributable to falling rates of childhood vaccination.

SFU is a respected centre of learning, and it should be doing everything in its power to educate the public about the vital importance of routine vaccination. It should counter the falsehoods spread by those who confuse correlation with causation and insist on unproven links between vaccination and autism. It should be concerned with, and actively campaign against, the types of misinformation and ignorance that put the province's children at risk of preventable disease. It should listen to its own colleagues in SFU's Faculty of Health Sciences, who, on their website, have unequivocally denied endorsement of the Vaccine Resistance Movement or its activities.

It should not, for the pittance of a space rental fee, implicitly endorse an event dedicated to the spread of misinformation that will help create a Canadian public health crisis.

We call on Simon Fraser University to strongly and unequivocally declare that it does not support the anti-vaccination message of the Vaccine Resistance Movement, and to acknowledge its mistake in allowing the promotion of inaccurate information and dangerous quackery to happen on its grounds.

Signed:

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Director, Centre for Inquiry Vancouver

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National Director, Centre for Inquiry Canada

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