

## Sabin Vaccine Institute Salutes Deborah Wexler, MD

### *Immunization Action Coalition Founder Turns Community Outreach into National Forum*

Deborah Wexler, MD believes in being well informed. Her work, her passion, and her life is seeing to it that healthcare providers—along with an often misinformed public—are well informed about immunizations and the catastrophes that can result when complacency sets in on this health topic.



Dr. Wexler is the founder and executive director of the Immunization Action Coalition (IAC), a nonprofit organization she started from grassroots efforts to boost immunization rates and thus prevent disease. Today it is an information clearinghouse helping healthcare providers to stay abreast of immunization requirements, benefits, and breakthroughs. The information published by IAC is available on the organization's website [www.immunize.org](http://www.immunize.org) and includes pediatric and adult immunization schedules and practical vaccine information and guidelines not only for physicians but for the public as well. In fact, some of the information has been translated into 29 languages!

Dr. Wexler graduated from the University of Minnesota with an undergraduate degree in biology in 1975 and a medical degree in 1982. As a medical resident in the University of Wisconsin Madison's Department of Family Medicine and Practice, she trained at the community-based program in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. There she became interested in hepatitis B prevention as she treated refugees from Southeast Asia, where there is a high rate of hepatitis B infection. She developed a clinic-wide tracking system to ensure that these refugees received vaccinations against hepatitis B or were followed for liver disease.

In 1988, while working at a community health center in St. Paul, Minnesota, she again treated refugees regularly and discovered that most of the refugees and their children citywide were not getting screened for or vaccinated against hepatitis B.

Because of this, Dr. Wexler and other public health and healthcare professionals formed the Hepatitis B Coalition. The Hepatitis B Coalition promotes hepatitis B vaccination for all children up to 18 years of age, screening for all pregnant women, testing and vaccination for high-risk groups, and education and treatment for people who are chronically infected with hepatitis B. In 1994, the Hepatitis B Coalition became an official program of IAC when IAC was granted tax exempt status.

IAC has grown from having just one staff member to an operation of eight full-time and two part-time employees, with several consultants who assist in program development, grant writing, and web site development. Today the IAC has a \$1 million budget.

A major focus of the IAC is its publication of three newsletters twice a year which provide helpful, practical immunization information for health professionals and the public. NEEDLE TIPS (illustrated by Dr. Wexler's children) is a 28-page newsletter mailed to 200,000 health professionals; VACCINATE ADULTS! is mailed to 180,000 adult medicine specialists; and VACCINATE WOMEN is mailed to 35,000 obstetrician/gynecologists and others who are concerned with women's health issues. All IAC's information is available on the main web site, [www.immunize.org](http://www.immunize.org), which provides links to the other websites maintained by the IAC, [www.vaccineinformation.org](http://www.vaccineinformation.org), [www.izcoalitions.org](http://www.izcoalitions.org), as well as [www.hepprograms.org](http://www.hepprograms.org).