Thimerosal, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and GlaxoSmithKline

Thomas Verstraeten

Pediatrics 2004;113;932-
DOI: 10.1542/peds.113.4.932

This information is current as of January 20, 2005

The online version of this article, along with updated information and services, is located on the World Wide Web at:
http://www.pediatrics.org/cgi/content/full/113/4/932
Thimerosal, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and GlaxoSmithKline

To the Editor—

I am the first author of a recent article on a study undertaken by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to screen for a potential link between thimerosal-containing vaccines and neurodevelopmental delays.1 The article has been subject to heavy criticism from antivaccine lobbyists. The article does not state that we found evidence against an association, as a negative study would. It does state, on the contrary, that additional study is recommended, which is the conclusion to which a neutral study must come. Does a neutral outcome reduce the value of a study? It may make it less attractive to publishers and certainly to the press, but it in no way diminishes its scientific and public health merit. A neutral study carries a very distinct message: the investigators could neither confirm nor exclude an association, and therefore more study is required. The CDC has taken its responsibility and is currently undertaking such additional study. The focus of all attention now should be on ensuring that these new studies are conducted under the most optimal conditions. Continuing the debate of the validity of the screening study is a waste of scientific energy and not to the benefit of the safety of US children or of all children worldwide that have the privilege of being vaccinated. All the discussion on how and why the results presented at different stages of the study may have changed slightly is futile for the same reason. The bottom line is and has always been the same: an association between thimerosal and neurological outcomes could neither be confirmed nor refuted, and therefore, more study is required.

Did GSK hire me away to manipulate the data before publication? Definitely not. This suggestion could be viewed as simply silly, were it not that it offends the ethical integrity of both the company and myself. Although I have been involved in some of the discussions concerning additional analyses that were undertaken after my departure from the CDC, I did not perform any of these additional analyses myself, nor did I instigate them. GSK was at no point involved in any discussions I had with former CDC colleagues on the study, nor were details of these discussions ever discussed between myself and GSK. The company and I had a very clear deal from the very start of my employment that I would finalize my involvement in the study on my own time and keep this involvement entirely separated from my work at GSK. I regard myself as a professional scientist who puts ethical value above all else, and I believe that I am currently employed by a company that has the same high ethical standards as myself. Therefore, any suggestion that GSK intended to have me manipulate this data is nothing short of an insult to both my integrity and the company’s integrity. Although I deeply regret such statements, I call on any party that truly has the safety of our children at heart to move beyond such pitiable attitudes and focus on the future of the ongoing research.

Thomas Verstraeten, MD, MSc
GlaxoSmithKline Biologicals
1330 Rixensart, Belgium

REFERENCE

Thimerosal, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and GlaxoSmithKline
Thomas Verstraeten
Pediatrics 2004;113;932-
DOI: 10.1542/peds.113.4.932

This information is current as of January 20, 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Updated Information &amp; Services</th>
<th>including high-resolution figures, can be found at: <a href="http://www.pediatrics.org/cgi/content/full/113/4/932">http://www.pediatrics.org/cgi/content/full/113/4/932</a></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Permissions &amp; Licensing</td>
<td>Information about reproducing this article in parts (figures, tables) or in its entirety can be found online: <a href="http://www.pediatrics.org/misc/Permissions.shtml">http://www.pediatrics.org/misc/Permissions.shtml</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reprints</td>
<td>Information about ordering reprints can be found online: <a href="http://www.pediatrics.org/misc/reprints.shtml">http://www.pediatrics.org/misc/reprints.shtml</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>