

## Letters to the Editor

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Letters should be submitted in duplicate in double-spaced typing on plain white paper with name and address of sender(s) on the letter. Send them to Jerold F. Lucey, MD, Editor, Pediatrics Editorial Office, Medical Center Hospital, Burlington, VT 05401.

### Lead Poisoning: Twenty Years After

To the Editor.—

In October 1991, the Centers for Disease Control decreased the blood lead level (PbB) from 25 to 10  $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$  and designated it as abnormal because of "overwhelming and compelling scientific evidence"<sup>1</sup> that 10  $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$  is associated with adverse neurobehavioral development. We have evidence to the contrary, obtained in a long-term follow-up of severely lead-poisoned children whom we treated before 1972 for PbBs between 80 and 470  $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$  (mean, 150.3  $\pm$  77.1  $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ ); their mean age was 28 months.

Treatment consisted of EDTA (edetate calcium disodium) alone or in combination with BAL (dimercaprol) until PbB fell to 60  $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ ; then treatment consisted of oral penicillamine until PbB fell to 50  $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ , when we discontinued chelating agents. The one criterion for admission to this study was a maximum PbB of  $\geq 80$   $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ . No patient was excluded because of genetic or acquired mental retardation or for any other condition.

In 1989, 60 of those patients, 57 black and 3 Hispanic, responded to a recall; 48 (80%) of them had graduated from high school (the dropout rate in Chicago for blacks and Hispanics is 55%)<sup>2</sup> and 5 of the 21 who entered college (35%) had received their degrees. An additional 13 patients, PbB  $\geq 100$   $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ , no longer living in Chicago, were reached by telephone: all had graduated from high school and three from college. Of the graduates, one is in a pediatric residency and two are in doctoral programs.

All 23 men and 20 of 37 women were working; eight (18%) were currently unemployed at a time when unemployment among Chicago blacks 20 to 24 years of age was 40% (Illinois State Employment Service, personal communication, 1990). Twelve men and 23 women had 1 to 4 children in 1989, 60 children in all.

The academic, vocational, and procreative achievements of these young adults, 31 of whom had symptomatic lead poisoning in early childhood, were comparable with their unaffected peers. Their prognosis, from the vantage point of 20 years later, was great.

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### Passive Tobacco Exposure and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome

To the Editor.—

In many populations, maternal smoking may be the single most important preventable risk factor for sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).<sup>1,2</sup> The report by Schoendorf and Kiely strongly supports this notion.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the authors suggest that passive tobacco exposure after birth, without previous fetal exposure, is independently associated with an increased risk of SIDS.

I agree wholeheartedly with Schoendorf and Kiely that intervention programs for pregnant smokers should focus on assisting them to quit permanently. However, the definition of the passive exposure group in this study (infants whose mothers reported smoking at the time of the survey but not during pregnancy *after* they found out they were pregnant) does not preclude fetal exposure to maternal smoking during the early weeks of pregnancy. Indeed, women who quit smoking usually do so only after they have learned they are pregnant.<sup>4</sup> Maternal cigarette smoking during a critical period *early* in pregnancy may be especially important in predisposing infants to SIDS later in life.<sup>5,6</sup>

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To the Editor.—

Drs Schoendorf and Kiely<sup>1</sup> report increased risk of SIDS, both in mothers smoking during and after pregnancy ("combined exposure") and in mothers smoking only afterward ("passive exposure"). Most previous studies<sup>2-18</sup> that reported that maternal smoking is associated with SIDS considered only smoking during pregnancy, but some<sup>2,4,11,15</sup> considered smoking after pregnancy. However, I am unaware of any previous study which attempted