Author's response to reviews

Title: Subacute Sclerosing Panencephalitis: Results of the Canadian Paediatric Surveillance Program and review of the literature.

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Author's response to editorial reviews:

BioMed Central Editorial Team:

Thank you again for considering our manuscript. We have made all the changes that the reviewers have suggested except for one item suggested by Dr. Banwell. You will see below that we have no access to the information she requested because of confidentiality issues, which need to be strongly respected for a program such as the CPSP to be successful. We did take the unusual step of trying to contact the reporting health care practitioner directly but had not heard a response and feel uncomfortable pursuing this any further. We do hope the acceptance of the manuscript will not hinge on this issue. Please see below direct responses to the reviewer comments.

Reviewer: Brenda Banwell

1. We have tried to contact the institution and health care practitioner where the biopsy was completed to get information on the biopsy and have not had a response. As pointed out in the earlier comments the ability to access such information is limited by the methods of the study. Subjects reported to the CPSP are to remain anonymous to the investigators and in this case the authors were not involved with the child directly. We agree with the reviewer that the description of the biopsy would be great but we do not have any other avenue to pursue if the reporting health care practitioner does not comply.

2. Please see comments from Dr. Weissbrich. We have hopefully made it clearer that no case of SSPE has been directly linked to vaccine strain of virus by adding a statement of this nature on page 13. The other reviewer feels strongly that we clearly recognize this issue.

Reviewer: Benedikt Weissbrich

1 and 2. We agree completely with the reviewer that the manuscript should avoid promoting any skepticism about the measles vaccination. In order to avoid raising controversy about measles vaccination we have eliminated the said clause in the introduction. We have also eliminated here the phrase "vaccination programs" and simply left this as standard exposures. Again, we agree with the author and we were simply trying to make a factual statement and not raise controversy about vaccination. There are many cases in the literature that have no clinical evidence of early measles infection (and only measles vaccination) that have never had specific typing to determine wild type or vaccine strain. As far as we can determine only a small number of studies have clearly delineated the strain of the measles virus in such cases. Thus we have made a statement that on page 13 to state clearly that we found no literature that identified vaccine strain measles as the cause of SSPE.

3. This has been changed. In fact since last edition on child has died. This is changed in the case report and abstract.

4. We have changed the table as suggested. In addition we went back and found the number of measles cases in Canada during the time two of our cases were exposed and formulated an estimate of risk per number of measles infection which is included in the text of page 13.

5. Changed as suggested.

6. All the abbreviations for interferon have been changed to IFN.

7. Changed.
8. Changed.
9. Changed.
10. Changed.
11. Changed.

We look forward to your response and hope you will find the alterations acceptable for publication.

Sincerely,

Craig Campbell MD FRCPC
Pediatric Neurologist