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Dear Dr. Stefano:

I am the Acting Director of the Immunization Safety Office of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). I am writing to express my concerns about the source of some of the material in a recent article published in Medical Science Monitor that purported to analyze data from the Vaccine Safety Datalink (VSD), a project that is located within my office. Specifically, the article by Geier and Geier, "A Two Phased Population Epidemiologic Study of the Safety of Thimerosal-Containing Vaccines: A Follow-Up Analysis," appearing in the April issue (Med Sci Monit 2005;11: CR160-170) contains striking similarities between parts of the article, including nearly all of the results from the "Phase II" study, and a draft manuscript on which I am a co-author.

In the article, Geier and Geier state that as independent researchers they have analyzed data on a cohort of children in the VSD database (see page CR163 of the article) and the paper is written to indicate that they themselves performed these analyses. Much of the text and the "Phase II" results in their article are nearly identical to a draft manuscript written in June 2000 by Thomas Verstraeten, Robert Davis, and myself for the VSD investigators. This was the first draft of a study whose final results were ultimately published in Pediatrics in November 2003 (reference #29 in the Geier and Geier article). The VSD June 2000 draft manuscript was based on preliminary results presented at the meeting of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices that month. The draft manuscript was obtained by the advocacy group Safe Minds in 2001 through the Freedom of Information Act and is posted on their website at the following link: http://www.SafeMinds.org/legislation/foia/VSD_VerstraetenJune2000.pdf.

I have enclosed copies of both the Geiers' published article and the June 2000 VSD draft manuscript (as downloaded directly from the publicly-accessible Safe Minds website) for your review. I have highlighted with similar colors those sections and results in the two documents that are the same. As you will note, in the "Phase II" results section of the published article the Geiers report the same relative risks as those that are found in the VSD June 2000 draft manuscript (Table 3, page 9). Also, Table 4 and Table 5 in the Geier article contain exactly the same results as Table 1 (page 6) and Table 2 (page 7), respectively, in the VSD draft manuscript. Furthermore, the text in several sections of the Geier article is nearly identical to corresponding sections of the VSD June 2000 draft manuscript.

I also have doubts that the Geiers actually performed the "Phase II" analyses because to the best of my knowledge they have not had access to the VSD data required to perform those analyses. I could provide more details if you like.

I felt it was important to inform you of this situation since you may not have been aware of the previous work by CDC. I hope that you will be able to carefully review the circumstances surrounding the Geier article for its ethical implications and compliance with your journal's policies of authorship.

Sincerely yours,

Frank DeStefano MD MPH
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Acting Director, Immunization Safety Office
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