

## Letter to the Editor

# Unexplained subdural hematoma in young children

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Reply to letter by Anselm C W Lee 'Unexplained subdural hematoma in young children', *Pediatrics International* **45**: 220.

Dr Lee suggests that making the diagnosis of so-called abusive head injury in young children is never easy because perpetrators hardly ever admit what they have done. Our report discusses the possibility that the 'abusive head injury' may not in fact be abusive, that the 'perpetrators' may in fact be innocent bystanders and that they are therefore not able to admit what they have not done. It is imperative that we understand that the conviction that subdural hemorrhage (plus retinal hemorrhage and no adequate explanation of injury) is the result of severe shaking is no more than a favored but unproven hypothesis.<sup>1</sup> The size of our series and the absence of any fatalities does not alter this fact. We willingly admit that we do not know or understand the cause of these tragic events. We also willingly admit that our

hypothesis that more trivial injury may be a cause in some cases is also unproven. We therefore re-iterate our conclusion that much more information on this very sensitive and serious issue is required, and that these data be collected with an open mind. What are needed in Hong Kong and elsewhere are large well-designed prospective case-control studies that can give a clearer picture of possible risk factors, a better understanding of etiology, more precise estimates of incidence and better documentation of mortality and long-term outcomes.

## References

- 1 Clark BJ. Retinal hemorrhages: evidence of abuse or abuse of evidence? *Am. J. Forensic Med. Pathology* 2001; **22**: 415–6.

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