Editorial

A message from Pediatric Annals’ Editor-in-Chief

Protect the Children

Stanford T. Shulman, MD

This issue features excellent reviews of hemangiomas in children. Also in the issue is the debut of our Sports Medicine column, co-authored by Cordelia W. Carter, MD, of Seattle Children’s Hospital, and Lyle J. Micheli, MD, of Boston Children’s Hospital.

My career choice to become a physician, especially a pediatrician, was a close call. Because of my love of sports and interest in writing, I almost became a sports journalist instead, building upon my stints as sports editor of my high school and college newspapers (I am now of course very grateful that I chose medical school instead!). Spectator sports remain important to me, however, and I regularly read the sports pages before any other news.

As I began to write this column, I had just read about the devastating report by former FBI director Louis Freeh concerning the catastrophic events at Penn State University, where assistant football coach Jerry Sandusky was recently convicted on 45 of 48 counts of sexually abusing 10 young boys from 1994 to 2009. Additional victims are now coming forth.

Freeh’s 267-page report highlights how legendary football coach Joe Paterno and other top Penn State officials (some currently awaiting trial on charges of perjury and failure to report suspected abuse) chose to protect the reputations of the University and its football program instead of guarding the safety of children. They concealed facts from the University community, the police, and the public. The New York Times quoted Freeh: “The most powerful men at Penn State failed to take any steps for 14 years to protect the children … they never demonstrated, through actions or words, any concern for the safety and well-being of Sandusky’s victims” until after he was arrested in 2011.

On the very day that Sandusky was convicted, in the same state, Msgr. William J. Lynn was convicted of endangering children in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia by covering up sexual abuse by priests under his supervision.

For those of us whose profession is based upon the protection, care and promotion of well-being of children, it is unfathomable how adults who are in a position to help can be so oblivious to the long-term psychic and physical damage done to children who are abused by adults in power and in whom they have put their trust.

In an interesting letter to the sports editor of The New York Times on July 15, 2012, Linda C. Love of Portland, Oregon wrote: “Your articles do not mention even one woman who tried to cover up Jerry Sandusky’s crimes. Maybe if we insisted on having women in leadership positions in all of our institutions, this kind of abuse would stop.” An interesting and thought-provoking idea!

Severe penalties have now been imposed upon Penn State University by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) for its gross and inexcusable complete lack of oversight and appropriate response to Sandusky’s horrific deeds. The “death penalty” for its football program would not have been too harsh, but the penalties now imposed will hopefully be sufficient to deter similar episodes of institutional failure to act to protect our children.

Participation in sports and church activities can be valuable for children and adolescents. However, all of us in child health care need to be more diligent in urging parents not to overlook clues to abuse that could be important, and that might prevent future episodes of abuse. For example, it is not unrea-
reasonable to inquire why an individual seeks to be a sports coach of young children if he has no children of his own who are enrolled in that program. Parents should also be urged to ensure that their children are made aware that their bodies are private. Let’s hope that shining a light on these awful activities will help us to protect children from future sexual predators.

**THIS MONTH’S STAMPS**

Stamps chosen to illustrate this column include the very timely 2012 stamp from Bolivia which celebrates the Year of No Violence against Children and Adolescents. The stamp with the red ribbon is from Ukraine and recognizes the 30 years of the AIDS epidemic. The gray 2012 Australian stamp honors Dame Kate Campbell (1899-1986), an Australian specialist in child health. She overcame gender discrimination to receive her medical degree and her pediatric training in Melbourne, her hometown, where she developed a lasting relationship with the Victorian Baby Health Center Association.

Campbell wrote the standard text for infant welfare nurses (7 editions from 1947-1972), and was a pioneer neonatologist. Her most important contributions were to the better understanding of Rh incompatibility and for showing that excessive oxygen administration to premature infants leads to retrolental fibroplasia (now termed retinopathy of prematurity). Dame Campbell was the first woman president of the Australian Paediatric Association and was made a Dame of the British Empire (equivalent to knighthood) in 1971.