SECOND OPINIONS

Genes don’t define us

I write to object to the second sentence of the article in the February AAP News about the genome project. It calls the project “a colossal endeavor to sequence the 3 billion base pairs containing the 80,000 genes that define a human being.”

Genetic progress is miraculous, and it will transform the practice of pediatrics as the article indicates, but our genes do not “define” us and they never will. This may seem quibbling over words, but I believe it is important for pediatricians to retain the humanistic perspective that has characterized our specialty for the last 100 years.

Norman J. Sissman, M.D., FAAP
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Sleep position and SIDS

Maybe I am not reading it straight, but the article in the March AAP News on statements by Drs. Kattwinkel and Keenan implies that now that the incidence of SIDS is down solely due to the recommendation of supine sleep position, we can now proceed to further reduce the incidence by addressing the issue of “what surface they are put on.”

It amazes me the way “confounding variables” are included or rejected, whichever way suits the needs of strengthening their thesis. Surely, addressing the safety of the sleeping environment — bedding, clothing and the air infants breathe — would be discussed in context with the admonition to have infants sleep on their backs.

I am never pleased when authorities doggedly dismiss any argument contrary to their theses. I don’t know where they got their data or their opinions of the importance of the arguments, but they feel that “all of the red flags that went up can be taken down.” I don’t know about plagiocephaly, but I do know there are many funny-looking heads out there. I guess, then, the problem is in the eyes of the beholder (like mottled dental enamel) and if drastic treatment measures are not required, then it is not a problem.

When I had a large Southern California practice and mother stayed home so that she could supervise on-the-tummy play-

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