Cancer in Iraqi children

I certainly enjoyed the article in the June 2003 issue of AAP News, titled “Military training helps doctors treat kids in post-war settings.” It was pleasing to see military pediatricians assisting in the medical care of Iraqi children, care that they probably wouldn’t get otherwise.

As we know, one of the chief causes of morbidity in Iraqi children is contaminated water, which has been caused in part by purification plants being damaged in the last two wars. The other issue is that of increased cancer rates among Iraqi children. Could this be related to the tons of depleted uranium that has been left in Iraq by the United States? I believe the U.S. should aggressively repair and rebuild water purification plants and intensively study the causes of increased rates of cancer in Iraqi children. As serious a situation as Iraq is in right now, prevention of disease is crucial. I feel the Academy should take a strong stand on these issues no matter what the political consequences are.

Joseph R Calabro, M.D., FAAP
Poughkeepsie, N.Y.

Proctored exam questioned

Dr. Edwards’ comments on the American Board of Pediatric’s (ABP) decision to continue to hold proctored testing (AAP News, June) reminds me what a visceral feeling I get about their bad decision. I have taken the boards after residency (proctored), and two recertification tests here in my office on my computer (Program for Renewal of Certification in Pediatrics). I have passed each one on my first try, without help, and I don’t see why I have to now go back to proctored testing. I have been practicing pediatrics for 16 years, have no malpractice suits against me, and more than keep ahead of my state’s requirements for CME. So why does the ABP think I will “cheat” now on my testing, requiring someone to look over my shoulder? What else will they do now: Raise the failure rate to 50% for practicing pediatricians? If I don’t need the recertification (for insurance or hospital purposes), I certainly won’t take it again. Taking the computer-based test was expensive and time consuming, but it is much more palatable than the stress of taking a test cold.

Bruce J. Man, M.D., M.M.M., FAAP
Leominster, Mass.

Recertification concerns

Dr. Stephen Edwards’ Letter from the President in the June issue again raises our members’ concerns regarding the recertification process. I agree with Dr. Edwards that continuing education is crucial to maintaining competency and being an informed pediatrician. However, it is quite unclear that a proctored, once in seven years, exam will significantly alter the practice and competency of the pediatrician. We need to call for evidence-based studies to assess the practice model for adult learning. The current proctored exam screams for crammed learning (once in seven years), is inconvenient for many, costly to most and offers no proven significant benefit over a home-based assessment.

It seems to me that consistent self-learning with assessment would provide an adequate process for ongoing learning. I urge all AAP members to write to their chapter leaders and those on the Board of the American Board of Pediatrics. It is critical they hear from us. Several resolutions related to board recertification are expected to be presented at the AAP Annual Chapter Forum in September.

Jeanne Marconi, M.D., FAAP
Norwalk, Conn.

PORTRAIT

Putting thoughts on paper

When writer’s block strikes, a quick catnap can instantly rejuvenate the mind.