Today’s piece was prepared by Thiebaut Herzog, MD, based on a CNN article, Mysterious Cluster of Birth Defects Stumps Doctors. <http://www.cnn.com/2014/03/01/health/cohen-birth-defects/>

This article reports on an observation that there was four-fold increase in neural tube defects in a rural 3-county area in Washington compared to the national average between January 2010 and January 2013, and discusses the Washington State Department of Health’s response to that finding.

The article is compelling in its use of personal stories and perspectives from a mother and a nurse personally affected by neural tube defects. The implied conclusion from the article is that the problem poses a significant ongoing public health risk to families in the community, and public health officials have not completed thorough and diligent research to identify causes and offer protection. While calling for more research is reasonable and justified, the article’s tone through the use of subtitles such as “very bad research” and “I wish they would take it more seriously” is leading and could erode the public’s confidence in the Department of Health’s competence and motives. For comparison, the Seattle Times ran a similar story in December 2015\* that reached many of the same conclusions but acknowledged limitations in the role of the Department of Health, their budget, and the inherent difficulty in examining clusters of birth defects. Parents concerned by this article could be referred to the Department of Health website for their anencephaly investigation to understand the most recent data and steps taken to understand possible causes. The Spina Bifida Association has research information and resources for parents to learn more about neural tube defects.

**RESOURCES ON NEURAL TUBE DEFECTS**

1. Spina Bifida Association (http://spinabifidaassociation.org)

2. Washington State Department of Health Website for Anencephaly Investigation (<http://www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/IllnessandDisease/BirthDefects/AnencephalyInvestigation#WhatLatest>)

\* <http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/birth-defects-mystery-how-state-is-missing-clues-to-solve-a-deadly-problem/>)

And that’s today’s Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics: IN THE NEWS!