Editorial

David G. McLone, Editor-in-Chief

Every year, thousands of infants are born with neural tube defects. Part of our mission as pediatric neurosurgeons should be to prevent diseases of the child's nervous system where possible. Children born with spina bifida face a life that is more difficult. We know that if women of child-bearing age take in at least 400 µg of folate, the rate of neural tube defects could be reduced by as much as 70%.

Research done in the 1980s clearly shows the benefit of 400 µg of folic acid. Folate is not only effective, but has been shown to be safe for the woman and the fetus. Folate does not eliminate neural tube defects, but a 70% reduction would be a major step in the right direction.

Surveys done in the US show that 68% of women have heard of folic acid, while only 13% know that folate can prevent birth defects, and 7% know that folate must be taken before pregnancy.

We, pediatric neurosurgeons, must advocate and support programs that make women aware of the benefits of a daily vitamin containing folic acid and make folic acid available to all women of child-bearing years.

The amount of ignorance among health care providers is alarming. We should support programs that educate those physicians and nurses who deliver care to young women. Awareness should lead to increased use of folate and a reduction in the number of children born with neural tube defects.