

# Introducing Historical Perspectives

Most of us have heard the story of the discovery of penicillin: how in 1928 the Scottish bacteriologist Alexander Fleming discovered a set of Petri dishes contaminated by spores of *Penicillium* mold that had seemingly destroyed the staphylococcal bacteria he was studying. Less remembered is the fact that Fleming gave up on penicillin within a few months, finding it extremely difficult to extract and purify. His 1929 article went largely unnoticed for nearly 10 years until Howard Florey and his wartime research team, seeking effective treatments for battlefield wounds, found it in the library. Florey's team deserves primary credit for developing penicillin into a practical antibiotic, yet it was the serendipitous nature of Fleming's earlier discovery that captured the public imagination.<sup>1</sup> What has been forgotten is that the story of penicillin involved a rediscovery—a great insight that was lost and then recovered thanks to a systematic historical literature search.

Historical research today has become marginalized from mainstream medical investigation and practice. Physicians and researchers are so deluged by information from the present that no time remains to consider the past. We live in a forward-thinking world, confident in progress and dismissive of claims that history may actually have something to teach us.

*Pediatrics* introduces a new quarterly feature, "Historical Perspectives," to counterbalance these tendencies. This month's opening article by Brosco et al,<sup>2</sup> for example, explores the implications of a little-known chapter in the history of newborn screening (the rise and fall of testing for histidinemia) for expanded newborn screening policy. It illustrates the primary goal of this feature: to provide relatively concise and readable historical articles or essays that illuminate pediatric practice today.

The Pediatric History Center of the American Academy of Pediatrics, located at its headquarters in Elk Grove Village, Illinois ([www.aap.org/research/history.htm](http://www.aap.org/research/history.htm)), has been supporting the same goals through its collections and oral history projects. Physicians and historians have produced a remarkable amount of scholarly work on the history of pediatrics that remains unknown to most practicing pediatricians. This feature aims to bring some of the fruits of this work to a broader audience in a manner that will be engaging and relevant. Who knows? Perhaps one of the current studies you read about in this month's issue of *Pediatrics* will become the "Historical Perspectives" column of the future.

## REFERENCES

1. Macfarlane G. *Alexander Fleming: The Man and the Myth*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; 1984
2. Brosco JP, Sanders LM, Dharia R, Guez G, Feudtner C. The lure of treatment: expanded newborn screening and the curious case of histidinemia. *Pediatrics*. 2010;125(3):417–419

**AUTHOR:** Jeffrey P. Baker, MD, PhD, FAAP

*Trent Center for Bioethics, Humanities, and History of Medicine, Duke University School of Medicine, Durham, North Carolina; Historical Archives Advisory Committee, American Academy of Pediatrics, Elk Grove Village, Illinois*

[www.pediatrics.org/cgi/doi/10.1542/peds.2009-3288](http://www.pediatrics.org/cgi/doi/10.1542/peds.2009-3288)

doi:10.1542/peds.2009-3288

Accepted for publication Dec 18, 2009

Address correspondence to Jeffrey P. Baker, MD, PhD, FAAP, Trent Center for Bioethics, Humanities, and History of Medicine, Duke University School of Medicine, Box 3040 DUMC, Durham, NC 27710. E-mail: [baker009@mc.duke.edu](mailto:baker009@mc.duke.edu)

PEDIATRICS (ISSN Numbers: Print, 0031-4005; Online, 1098-4275).

Copyright © 2010 by the American Academy of Pediatrics

**FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE:** *The author has indicated he has no financial relationships relevant to this article to disclose.*

## Introducing Historical Perspectives

Jeffrey P. Baker

*Pediatrics* 2010;125;596

DOI: 10.1542/peds.2009-3288 originally published online February 15, 2010;

### Updated Information & Services

including high resolution figures, can be found at:  
<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/125/3/596>

### References

This article cites 1 articles, 1 of which you can access for free at:  
<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/125/3/596#BIBL>

### Permissions & Licensing

Information about reproducing this article in parts (figures, tables) or in its entirety can be found online at:  
<http://www.aappublications.org/site/misc/Permissions.xhtml>

### Reprints

Information about ordering reprints can be found online:  
<http://www.aappublications.org/site/misc/reprints.xhtml>

# American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®



# PEDIATRICS<sup>®</sup>

OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS

## Introducing Historical Perspectives

Jeffrey P. Baker

*Pediatrics* 2010;125;596

DOI: 10.1542/peds.2009-3288 originally published online February 15, 2010;

The online version of this article, along with updated information and services, is located on the World Wide Web at:

<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/125/3/596>

Pediatrics is the official journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics. A monthly publication, it has been published continuously since 1948. Pediatrics is owned, published, and trademarked by the American Academy of Pediatrics, 345 Park Avenue, Itasca, Illinois, 60143. Copyright © 2010 by the American Academy of Pediatrics. All rights reserved. Print ISSN: 1073-0397.

American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN<sup>®</sup>

