Controversy Surrounding Abusive Head Trauma

Christopher Spencer Greeley, MD, MS
Chief, Section of Public Health and Child Abuse
Texas Children’s Hospital
Professor of Pediatrics
Baylor College of Medicine

Purpose

• Frame the current “scientific debate”
  - Overview of themes
• Provide themes on the critical assessment of medical literature/theory
• Review some of the published literature

Outline

• Describe Abusive Head Trauma
• Frame main skeptical themes
• Review some alternative explanations for AHT that are proposed in court
Ground Rules
• Won’t review the merits of every theory
• Will use medical literature examples
  - Focus on the concepts, not the references/authors
• No ad hominem/feminam references
  - We refer to papers by author’s names
  - Comments regard the paper, not the author
• If I am wrong, I want to know

Take Home Messages
• There exists important unresolved issues regarding AHT
• Careful, independent appraisal of the literature and research is required
• There are many sources of information
  - Both good and not-so-good
• AHT cases commonly play out in the media
Does SBS/AHT Actually Exist?

Politics
• Different motivations
• Apocryphal language
• Apocalyptic themes
• Demeaning, confrontational tone
• Adversarial

Not Like Politics
• There is a RIGHT answer
• Not philosophy/ideology
• “Understand-able”
• “Provable”
Short Falls Are Fatal

Shaking is not dangerous

Absence of Neck Injury
There Is No Science Behind AHT