To the Editor: In their exhaustive study, Nelson *et al.* (1) do not include any information about levels of interferon α . This omission is surprising given the authors' previous publication, noting that levels of interferon α were raised in term infants with cerebral palsy (2). Furthermore, young children given interferon α therapeutically have developed spastic diplegia (3–5). In these children, interferon α appears to have a specific effect on corticospinal axons, but without any apparent structural damage in the cerebral hemispheres. It is therefore possible that, in this acquired form of diplegia, there is selective degeneration of the distal endings of the corticospinal tract. Spastic diplegia is the most common form of cerebral palsy associated with prematurity and evidence has been produced that this disorder may also be the result of a “dying back neuropathy” and hence the lesion is in the caudal part of the spinal cord rather than in the brain (6, 7). An experimental study, in which

neonatal animals are given interferon α would be justified in order to explore this possibility.

C.L. Crawford

Imperial College of Medicine
Charing Cross Hospital
Fulham Palace Road
London W6 8RF U.K.
clcraw13@hotmail.com

REFERENCES

1. Nelson KB, Grether JK, Dambrosia JM, Walsh E, Kohler K, Satyanarayana G, Nelson PG, Dickens BF, Phillips TM 2003 Neonatal cytokines and cerebral palsy in very preterm infants. *Pediatr Res* 53:600–607
2. Grether JK, Nelson KB, Dambrosia JM, Phillips TM 1999 Interferons and cerebral palsy. *J Pediatr* 134:324–331
3. Vesikari T, Nuutila A, Cantrell K 1988 Neurologic sequelae following interferon therapy of juvenile laryngeal papilloma. *Acta Paediatr Scand* 77:619–622
4. Chang E, Boyd A, Nelson CC, Crowley D, Law T, Keough KM, Folkman J, Ezekowitz RA, Castle VP 1997 Successful treatment of infantile hemangiomas with interferon alpha-2b. *J Pediatr Hematol Oncol* 19:237–244
5. Barlow CF, Priebe CJ, Mulliken JB, Barnes PD, MacDonald D, Folkmann J, Ezekowitz RA 1998 Spastic diplegia as a complication of interferon alpha-2a treatment of hemangiomas in infancy. *J Pediatr* 132:527–530
6. Crawford CL, Hobbs MJ 1994 Anatomy of diplegia: an hypothesis. *Dev Med Child Neurol* 36:513–517
7. Crawford CL 2002 Do white cells matter in white matter damage? *Trends Neurosci* 25:20–21

DOI: 10.1203/01.PDR.0000084288.17766.0E