



## **Background Report**

**Poul Thorsen, MD, PhD**

### **CDC Researcher – Fugitive from Justice**

**November 2012**

**Tax evasion, money laundering, wire fraud, violations of dual employment regulations leading to dismissal from a leading research university -- all connected with embezzling grant money through an elaborate scheme of falsifying invoices and forging signatures.**

**With all these criminal irregularities, how can anyone trust the data this researcher produced? Why haven't calls for retracting his studies gone out? The money aside, Poul Thorsen's research has had a profound influence on vaccine policy – both here in the USA and abroad. Ultimately the health community's acceptance of his research as being beyond reproach raises concerns about the safety of all children receiving vaccines. If data were altered to fit the desired outcomes, then outcomes using this research become tainted, especially the National Academies of Science Institute of Medicine's (IOM) strong reliance on his work for determining the potential for harm from thimerosal in vaccines. The details of these issues are summarized in this report.**

SafeMinds is a non-profit organization founded to restore health and protect future generations by eradicating the devastation of autism and associated health disorders induced by mercury and other man made toxicants. As part of SafeMinds' ongoing activities to inform the public and policy makers about the many research irregularities that continue to undermine the public trust in government health agencies and impede progress in curtailing the epidemic increase of autism rates, we are making available a background report on Poul Thorsen, a key figure in the building of a shaky foundation of research that denied justice to thousands of families whose children suffered a vaccine related neurological injury (brain and nervous system) that developed into autism spectrum disorder (ASD or autism).

This information has previously been provided to Congressional staff as part an ongoing education program to bring legislators' attention to the needs of the autism community including those who came to the community as a result of a vaccine related brain injury. With the recent announcement that Dr. Thorsen was placed on the top of the "Most Wanted" list form the Inspector General of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS); SafeMinds has decided to make this full report public.

**Federal Charges:** October 25, 2012, the Office of the Inspector General added Dr. Poul Thorsen to their “OIG Most Wanted Fugitives” List<sup>1</sup> Of the many concerns about Dr. Thorsen; the most troubling aspect is the April 13, 2011 Federal indictment.<sup>2</sup> The United States Attorney’s Office in the Northern District of Georgia issued a public statement<sup>3</sup> announcing that a federal grand jury had indicted Poul Thorsen, (MD, PhD) 49 years old of Denmark on 13 counts of wire fraud and 9 counts of money laundering. United States Attorney Sally Quillian Yates stated that Thorsen “is alleged to have orchestrated a scheme to steal over \$1 million in CDC grant money earmarked for autism research.”

*Nature* online printed the following announcement on April 20, 2011<sup>4</sup>:

**Research fraud:** *Prosecutors in the United States are seeking to extradite a Danish scientist researching the relationship between autism and vaccines, who, they allege, stole more than US\$1 million in research funding. Poul Thorsen was a visiting scientist at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta in the 1990s. US prosecutors say that after returning to Denmark in 2002, Thorsen submitted false invoices from the CDC to Aarhus University, which unknowingly transferred funds to his personal account. He was last week charged with 13 counts of wire fraud and 9 of money laundering.*

**The Indictment:** The Criminal Indictment No. 1: 11-C R-194 United States of America v. Poul Thorsen<sup>5</sup> states that beginning around February 2004 and continuing through February 2010, that “aided and abetted by others known and unknown, did knowingly devise and intend to devise a scheme and artifice to defraud and to obtain money and property by means of materially false and fraudulent pretenses, representations, and promises and omissions of material facts, well knowing and having reason to know that said pretenses, representations and promises were and would be false and fraudulent...” The indictment provides that Thorsen submitted false invoices and created private bank accounts at the CDC Federal Credit Union to which he had monies wired to pay invoices (from a CDC laboratory using false signatures) and then used the monies (close to \$1 million) to purchase a Harley Davidson motorcycle, two automobiles and a home listed as a 4 bedroom, 5 bath 2688 sq ft home at 2657 Briar Lake Road, Atlanta, Georgia 30345.

The Justice Department provides that it will seek to recover all of the property that Poul Thorsen purchased, however; Dekalb County tax records<sup>6</sup> show that the aforementioned home is no longer owned by Thorsen. It is now owned by another CDC associated individual (Janet Henry)<sup>7</sup>. The Briar Lake Road home listed in the indictment in April 2011 was foreclosed on by the lender in March 2011 after a default on the \$405,000 owed. It appears that a bank sale was conducted in

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<sup>1</sup> <https://oig.hhs.gov/fraud/fugitives/index.asp>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.rescuepost.com/files/thorsen-indictment.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.justice.gov/usao/gan/press/2011/04-13-11.html>

<sup>4</sup> 20 April 2011 | *Nature* 472, 264-265 (2011) | doi:10.1038/472264a

[http://www.nature.com/news/2011/110420/full/472264a.html?s=news\\_rss](http://www.nature.com/news/2011/110420/full/472264a.html?s=news_rss)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.rescuepost.com/files/thorsen-indictment.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <http://web.co.dekalb.ga.us/TaxCommissioner/TCDisplay.asp?ParcelStatus=Y&pin=2546557>

<sup>7</sup> A search on 11/1/12 of the HHS Employee directory finds Janet Henry listed as a contractor in the CDC’s Office of Noncommunicable Diseases, Injury and Environmental Health, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion ([janet.henry@cdc.hhs.gov](mailto:janet.henry@cdc.hhs.gov))

August 2011, thus removing the property from Thorsen's ownership (and the Justice Department's reach). Available data show that there was an attempt to sell the listed home for almost \$500,000, the price was dropped repeatedly and then withdrawn from market.<sup>8</sup>

**If convicted on all counts:** Poul Thorsen could face up to 260 years in prison and \$22.5 million in fines.<sup>9,10</sup>

**Poul Thorsen:** Thorsen stands as the principal investigator (lead-researcher) on all CDC-funded Danish research used to counter arguments from families claiming their children suffered vaccine injuries including, among other conditions, the onset of symptoms of autism spectrum disorder.

Dr. Thorsen acted as a visiting scientist at the (CDC) Division of Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities. He successfully promoted the idea of awarding research funds to Aarhus University in Denmark to study the relationship between autism and vaccines. According to the indictment, he "provided input and guidance for the research to be conducted."

It would appear that he built a strong relationship with CDC staff, and beginning in 2001 began a relationship that has underwritten his entire career. Beginning in 2001, Dr. Thorsen lists himself as affiliated with both a) the Developmental Disabilities Branch, Division of Birth Defects, Child Development, and Disability and Health, National Center for Environmental Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta and b) Danish Epidemiology Sciences Centre, Aarhus University. He is further listed as the corresponding author of the paper.<sup>11</sup> A year later he removed the Aarhus University affiliation from his next publication and only listed his CDC affiliation with colleague Dr. Diana Schendel.<sup>12</sup>

At the time his article was published in 2003, "Thimerosal and the Occurrence of Autism: Negative Ecological Evidence From Danish Population-Based Data", Thorsen claims an affiliation with the Danish Epidemiology Science Centre, Department of Epidemiology and Social Medicine, University of Aarhus, Denmark.

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<sup>8</sup> Conversation with realtor with access to Georgia MLS systems confirmed that Thorsen had owned the property, that it had been listed for sale in the high \$400'000s and then dropped at least 3 times in price into the \$300,000s before being removed from the market by the bank which had foreclosed on Thorsen in March 2011.

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.naturalnews.com/032216\\_Thorsen\\_fraud.html](http://www.naturalnews.com/032216_Thorsen_fraud.html)

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.justice.gov/usao/gan/press/2011/04-13-11.html> "The indictment charges THORSEN with 13 counts of wire fraud and 9 counts of money laundering. The wire fraud counts each carry a maximum of 20 years in prison, and the money laundering counts each carry a maximum of 10 years in prison, with a fine of up to \$250,000 for each count."

<sup>11</sup> [Identification of biological/biochemical marker\(s\) for preterm delivery](#). Thorsen P, Schendel DE, Deshpande AD, Vogel I, Dudley DJ, Olsen J. Paediatr Perinat Epidemiol. 2001 Jul;15 Suppl 2:90-103.PMID: 11520403

<sup>12</sup> [Public health issues related to infection in pregnancy and cerebral palsy](#). Schendel DE, Schuchat A, Thorsen P. *Ment Retard Dev Disabil Res Rev*. 2002;8(1):39-45 Source Division of Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, Georgia 30341, USA. dcs6@cdc.gov

CDC's Dr. Schendel is co-author on 36 papers with Dr. Thorsen and has continued to collaborate with Dr. Thorsen even after the indictment. PubMed provides that she is co-author on two articles in the second half of 2011 and most recently an article published in October 2012.<sup>13</sup>

**Effect on long-term US policy making:** Dr. Thorsen was actively engaged with the American Psychiatric Association (APA) in the development of the highly controversial fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-5). The work group is chaired by Dr. Susan Sweedo of the National Institutes of Health. According to the brief bio on the APA website<sup>14</sup> Dr. Thorsen listed his position in January 2010 as Adjunct Associate Professor, Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, School of Public Health, Drexel University, Philadelphia, PA, USA. The APA website notes that Dr. Thorsen requested a 'leave of absence' from the work group.<sup>15</sup>

Thorsen claims on the bio he provided the APA that he started his first project in 1987 while still a medical doctoral student, and that he "managed a considerable number of studies on autism, national as well as international" further claiming his research career began in 1992. From a search of the internet and Dr. Thorsen's indications, he has authored or co-authored more than 90 scientific articles and book chapters.

|              |   |
|--------------|---|
| 1996         | Began work on the Danish National Birth Cohort  |
| 1997-2000    | Visiting scientist, CDC   |
| 2000-2008    | Associate Professor, Department of Epidemiology, School of Public Health, University of Aarhus, Denmark,                  |
| 2008-2009    | Research Professor, Department of Epidemiology, Rollins School of Public Health, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia, USA, |
| 1999-present | Associate, Department of Epidemiology, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland, USA.                                |
| 1998-2005    | March of Dimes, PERI grantee  |
| 1999-2008    | CDC appointed principal investigator on the "Epidemiologic studies of reproductive and developmental outcome – Denmark."  |

During the period 2000-2008, the bio claims that Dr. Thorsen established the research group known as "North Atlantic Neuro-epidemiology Alliances" (NANEA) originally initiated to do research on Cerebral Palsy in 1999-2000. He provides that in January 2010, more than 30 researchers are affiliated. NANEA's main research areas were:

- a) Autism
- b) Cerebral palsy
- c) Neuropsychological development
- d) Preterm birth
- e) Down syndrome, and
- f) Hearing loss

<sup>13</sup> [Cytokines and Posthemorrhagic Ventricular Dilation in Premature Infants](#). Ambalavanan N, Carlo WA, McDonald SA, Das A, Schendel DE, Thorsen P, Hougaard DM, Skogstrand K, Higgins RD; for the Cytokine and Generic Database Subcommittees of the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health Human Development Neonatal Research Network. *Am J Perinatol*. 2012 Oct;29(9):731-740. Epub 2012 Jul 6.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.dsm5.org/MeetUs/Documents/Neurodev/Thorsen%20-%20Disclosure%20-%20201-22-10.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.dsm5.org/MeetUs/Pages/BioPoulThorsen.aspx>

On the APA DSM-5 working group website it states Thorsen participated in the *Autism and Other Pervasive Developmental Disorders Conference* in February 2008.<sup>16</sup> The DSM-5 has come under criticisms for proposing changes to the criteria for diagnosing autism spectrum disorders that would in some opinions prevent up to 75% of higher function or Asperger's individuals from qualifying for services.

In contradiction to Thorsen's claims, the evidence shows he was not involved in autism research until the 2002 article on the MMR vaccine and autism. Prior to this, most of his publications focus on sexually transmitted diseases, infections during pregnancy, and neonatal research – more of a shotgun approach to vaccines and public health issues rather than a bull's-eye topical focus that most feel make one an expert in a field.

**Thorsen Broke Other Rules as Well:** In January 2010, Aarhus University issued a formal statement<sup>17</sup> distancing itself from Poul Thorsen, confirming that the University discovered shortages of funds in the CDC grant accounts. This was reported to the Danish Agency for Science, Technology and Innovation (DASTI). DATSI conducted an internal investigation and referred the matter to the police. The letter states:

“In March 2009, Dr. Thorsen resigned his faculty position at Aarhus University. In the meantime, it has come to the attention of Aarhus University that Dr Thorsen has continued to act in such a manner as to create the impression that he still retains a connection to Aarhus University after the termination of his employment by the university. Furthermore, it has come to the attention of Aarhus University that Dr. Poul Thorsen has held full-time positions at both Emory University and Aarhus University simultaneously. Dr. Thorsen's double Full-time employment was unauthorized by Aarhus University, and he engaged in this employment situation despite the express prohibition of Aarhus University.”

In addition to the criminal acts uncovered, Aarhus publicized that Thorsen violated the rules of employment for the University. This demonstrates a pattern of unethical behavior by Thorsen, one indicating that rules do not matter – that he is above the law, above university rules, and likely above ethical standards of good science.

**Tax Evasion:** Danish Journalist Ulla Denielsen reported via a blog that the Danish government sought to prosecute Poul Thorsen for tax evasion. In 2009 the prosecution charged Poul Thorsen, with gross tax evasion concerning an amount of fully 6, 4 million DKK (US\$ 1.13 million). For this, the Prosecution claims Poul Thorsen must be punished with prison. As stated in the indictment, Poul Thorsen during the years 2001-2005 evaded income from fees, salary or the like for 6,430,768 DKK. Thorsen's attorney sought to have the charges be dismissed. A hearing scheduled for March 29, 2012 dismissed the charges on technicalities based on deficits in the indictment, not because Thorsen was exonerated from the charges.<sup>18,19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.dsm5.org/research/pages/autismandotherpervasivedevelopmentaldisordersconference%28february3-5,2008%29.aspx>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.rescuepost.com/files/thorsen-aarhus.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> <http://nbjour.wordpress.com/2012/03/14/danish-high-profile-tax-case-postponed-again/>

<sup>19</sup> <http://nbjour.wordpress.com/2012/04/13/breaking-prosecutor-wants-danish-highest-court-to-reconsider-dismissed-thorsen-tax-case/>

**The CDC-Denmark Study Outcomes:** The CDC provides on its website a complete list of the articles published as a result of the CDC collaboration in Denmark.<sup>20</sup> Poul Thorsen is a co-author in 21 of the 24 papers.

**Autism Related Papers:** Thorsen's entry into the autism research realm began in 2002 with the publication of the first Aarhus/CDC paper. In the decade since, he has co-authored 21 papers (2 in a Danish journal, duplicates to two English language publications, so in essence 19 studies.) (Exhibit 1) These publications started after he returned to Aarhus University in 2002; beginning in 2005 he claimed he was affiliated with North Atlantic Neuro-Epidemiology Alliances, Department of Epidemiology and Social Medicine, University of Aarhus, Aarhus, Denmark.

An article published online in April 2010 again with CDC employee Dr. Schendel lists Dr. Thorsen without any affiliation, but living in Atlanta. A May 2010 paper fails to include Thorsen's affiliation. In a paper published in June 2011 (and published online a year before), Dr. Thorsen is listed as being employed at the Institute of Public Health at the Department of Epidemiology, University of Aarhus, Aarhus, Denmark. One of his co-authors again is CDC employee Diana E. Schendel, Ph.D.

From June 2011 to November 2012 (following the US federal indictment) 16 papers were published as peer-reviewed literature and posted on PUBMED listing Poul Thorsen as a co-author. The CDC continues to promote research he is affiliated with as recently as October 2012 on the agency's website.<sup>21</sup> These more recent studies list him as employed at the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Lillebaelt Hospital, Kolding, Denmark.

An inquiry to Lillebaelt Hospital, Kolding Denmark on March 20, 2012 confirmed that Poul Thorsen is indeed employed there and provided his email address Poul.Bak.Thorsen@slb.regionsyddanmark.dk.

An internet search for Poul Bak Thorsen found that Thorsen continues his involvement in research, but now referred to as "Poul Bak Thorsen" or "PB Thorsen." His research team provided a poster session at the Society of American Gastrointestinal and Endoscopic Surgeons (SAGES) in early March in San Diego. It is unclear whether Dr. Thorsen came to the United States himself (since the Department of Justice has extradition orders for him with the Danish government to face criminal charges). Immigration is supposed to have his passport flagged.

**Aarhus Receives Major Funding in 2012:** It was widely announced in early March in Denmark, that the Aarhus University will receive a grant for the project to be known as 'The Lundbeck Foundation's Initiative for Integrative Psychiatric Research' (iPSYCH). The grant of

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/developmentaldisabilities/documents/Articles-Completed-Denmark.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> <http://friendsnippets.net/phlic/sciclips/issues/v4issue41.html>

DKK 121m (approximately \$21.5 million) from the Lundbeck Foundation is the largest grant ever awarded to Danish psychiatric research. It will look at five mental health conditions including autism's connections between genetics and the environment.<sup>22</sup>

The Lundbeck Foundation<sup>23</sup> is a commercial foundation that holds 70% of the shares in the Lundbeck Group, a global pharmaceutical company working on brain disorders. Lundbeck Group has at least eight mental health drugs in phase II and III development stages with two in registration process. A Lise Bech Jellesmark - Thorsen is listed as a PhD research student at a Lundbeck Foundation activity at Aarhus.<sup>24</sup> It is not known at this time if there is a relationship between Lisa and Poul.

**NANEA:** The North Atlantic Neuro-Epidemiology Alliances, Department of Epidemiology and Social Medicine, University of Aarhus, Aarhus, Denmark (referred to as NANEA) received \$16 million in grant funds from the CDC. A March 2010 article in a Danish newspaper<sup>25</sup> details how the project was ‘gold plated’ because of the American money, and due to its funding it grew larger than the actual Department of Epidemiology at the university and thus moved to its own headquarters. The article states, *“In the first years of the employees live in a world of glitz and pampering.” We run in a huge Mercedes! 'Is the watchword, and it's true. Every time a scientist travels into the country to gather data, it is in business class, says Anja. Lise says that the Danes are visiting in Atlanta, where they are impressed when a limousine rolls up in front of the hotel door to take them to meetings with the CDC. Delicious dinners, expensive brands of alcohol and stay in luxury get-aways as Denmark's castles are on the program when the traffic goes the other way and money the men from the USA visiting Denmark.”*

This article implies there may have been other interests involved in NANEA (which may have created a financial conflict of interest on the CDC funded grants) and states that several of the employees were paid sums in addition to their government salary, an action that is considered illegal in Denmark. A timeline of potential interest is also provided in the article:

### NANEA's Rise and Fall

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| <b>2000</b>             | NANEA created with CDC grant of \$7.8 million (Poul Thorsen to run)   |
| <b>2007</b>             | CDC provides another \$ 8.2 million.  |
| <b>2008</b>             | Poul Thorsen moved to Atlanta, but remained as scientific and administrative head of NANEA  |
| <b>Winter 2008-2009</b> | AU discovers there are no funds for research done at NANEA. Poul Thorsen assures them money will come from the U.S. and provides declarations of grants as documentation. |
| <b>March 2009</b>       | Poul Thorsen resigns his position at Aarhus University. NANEA disbanded, but projects continue under new management.  |

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.au.dk/en/about/news/single/artikel/record-breaking-grant-new-research-project-to-investigate-the-causes-of-mental-disorders/>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.lundbeckfoundation.com/>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.cirro.dk/profile?username=lisethorsen>

<sup>25</sup> [www.information.dk/227065](http://www.information.dk/227065) (in Danish) and [http://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=da&u=http://www.information.dk/227065&prev=/search%3Fq%3DNorth%2BAtlantic%2BNeuro-Epidemiology%2BAlliances%26hl%3Den%26client%3Dfirefox-a%26hs%3DB05%26rls%3Dorg.mozilla:en-US:official%26prmd%3Dimvns&sa=X&ei=Wq2TUN\\_dAqyM0QHcnYG4Cq&ved=0CDoQ7qEwBA](http://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=da&u=http://www.information.dk/227065&prev=/search%3Fq%3DNorth%2BAtlantic%2BNeuro-Epidemiology%2BAlliances%26hl%3Den%26client%3Dfirefox-a%26hs%3DB05%26rls%3Dorg.mozilla:en-US:official%26prmd%3Dimvns&sa=X&ei=Wq2TUN_dAqyM0QHcnYG4Cq&ved=0CDoQ7qEwBA) (translated to English)

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| <b>Spring 2009</b>   | University of Aarhus discovers three letters acknowledging grants from the CDC were apparently falsified, just as the CDC does not acknowledge a letter on an outstanding amount of NANEA first appropriation. In all, falsified signatures appear on documents totaling nearly two million dollars. |
| <b>May 2009</b>      | Science, Technology and Innovation Council submit a police report. The notification is not directed against any named person.  |
| <b>Fall 2009</b>     | University of Aarhus discovers that Poul Thorsen has maintained a dual appointment as associate professor in Denmark and a professor at Emory University in Atlanta that the University of Aarhus did not approve.   |
| <b>January 2010</b>  | University of Aarhus director Jorgen Jorgensen denounces Poul Thorsen in a message to NANEA-project partners. The message also mentions the fraud case   |
| <b>February 2010</b> | Savannah Morning News takes up the case and the other media follow.  |
| <b>March 2010</b>    | Østjyllands Police investigators continue to raise a charge against the key person.  |

Other articles from the same news sources indicate that at least one other scientist is under investigation.

### Conclusions and Questions that Remain

**The Danish Vaccine Studies are tainted:** Years before the criminal activities came to light studies from Thorsen had been called into question based on conflicts of interest, design flaws and quality issues. These same studies were used by the US government as the basis to refute any link between vaccine injury and the onset of the symptoms of autism spectrum disorders.

Two evaluations provide an analysis of the Danish and other CDC funded studies. The first, from then Congressman Dave Weldon, a physician with training in immunology presented at the Autism One conference.<sup>26</sup> The second is a summary provided by SafeMinds, entitled, “Vaccines and Autism – What Do Epidemiological Studies Really Tell Us?”<sup>27</sup> Also provided by SafeMinds is an analysis by Mark Blaxill of the Danish study published in *Pediatrics* which concludes the paper provided distorted and misleading information. Thorsen is a co-author of the paper with Madsen.<sup>28</sup>

In April 2012, Brian Hooker published an article online at *Age of Autism*<sup>29</sup> which detailed information received from the CDC through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) (emails and other communications) which indicated that the statistical value of the research is questionable, that the early research did, in fact indicate that autism “rates are still going down” after the elimination of thimerosal from Danish Vaccines. JB Handley also discusses the Danish studies

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.vce.org/mercury/Weldon.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.safeminds.org/news/documents/Vaccines%20and%20Autism.%20Epidemiology%20Rebuttal.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.safeminds.org/research/Blaxill-DenmarkAutismThimerosalPediatrics.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.ageofautism.com/2012/04/revisiting-denmark-more-rotten-than-ever.html>

fraudulent outcomes on *Age of Autism*, which also provides links to a CDC letter (Signed by Dr. Jose Cordero<sup>30</sup>) to the Editor of *Pediatrics* asking that the paper be published (after it was rejected by two other journals).<sup>31</sup>

As a sidebar, a March 2012 email from Dr. Madsen, the lead author in the *Pediatrics* paper, confirms that thimerosal was removed from vaccines in Denmark in 1992 and also states that he (Dr. Madsen) is no longer involved in epidemiology research.

In the dozen years since the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform first looked into the government's handling of the epidemic rise in rates of autism spectrum disorder and its possible link to vaccine injury, the CDC became party to a \$16 million investment in Denmark to obtain research studies to exonerate the vaccine program. As much as \$2 million of that investment is alleged to have been absconded by Poul Thorsen, the researcher who came to the CDC as an employee, earned enough trust at the CDC to influence grant direction, and in a breach of federal policy, acted as principal investigator of the program where he had directed the funds.

Even after being indicted by the US Government for mail fraud and money laundering, Dr. Thorsen continues to collaborate with at least one CDC employee (Diana Schendel) and his papers promoted on the CDC website. Thorsen also faced charges of tax evasion in Denmark which were dismissed for technical reasons (which means the matter remains available for refiling). He continues to be employed in Denmark. The US has yet to extradite him, although he may have entered the US to make a poster session presentation in San Diego in early March 2012. As of late October 2012, Thorsen is listed among the "Most Wanted Fugitives" by the Office of the Inspector General of HHS.

**Many questions remain regarding the gross mismanagement of \$16 million and the management of the criminal case.** They include:

**Question:** Can it be that Thorsen acted alone? (Many feel it is unlikely.) Are the CDC and/or Aarhus University seeking to make Thorsen a scapegoat?

**Question:** Is it possible for the very same Justice Department that used Thorsen's research against families seeking compensation in the Vaccine Injury Compensation Program to present an unbiased and effective prosecution?

**Question:** Who were the career CDC employees who allowed Dr. Thorsen to become principal investigator of the Denmark study? (Ethically he should not have been allowed to since he played a significant role in developing the grant and seeing it awarded to Denmark. He in essence personally benefited from the grant which he helped direct to Denmark -even before the criminal activity).

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<sup>30</sup> Dr. Cordero was Founding Director of the National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities who has since left the CDC now serves on the Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee as a public member.

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.ageofautism.com/2010/03/first-fraud-dr-poul-thorsen-and-the-original-danish-study.html>

**Question:** Does the CDC continue to fund research in Denmark?

**Question:** Who at the CDC/HHS was responsible for overseeing the \$16 million dollar grant to Denmark? How did they not see the fraud?

**Question:** More than 18 months after the indictment, what is the status of the prosecution?

**Question:** Why are the Danes not cooperating on the extradition?

**Question:** Did Thorsen actually enter the US in March 2012 unnoticed? If so, how did he do so unnoticed?

**Congressional Oversight Needed:** The Poul Thorsen management in and of itself calls for oversight. Given the importance the research (he was pivotal in managing) has played in both the IOM's review of the matter as well as the emphasis placed on this data by the government in the Autism Omnibus proceedings of the National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program, an inquiry is urgently needed. Autism has gone from a national epidemic to a national emergency with rates 73% higher than the initial inquiry in 2007 of children born in 1995.<sup>32,33</sup>

SafeMinds and the Elizabeth Birt Center for Law & Advocacy on behalf of the community have asked the Congress to take action on this matter. ([www.safeminds.org](http://www.safeminds.org) & [www.ebcala.org](http://www.ebcala.org))

### Concluding Comments

The entire history of research evaluating the possible link between exposure to toxins such as thimerosal, vaccine injuries and the dramatic rise in the prevalence in autism rates in the United States shows a history of research irregularities.

Examples of this include the now infamous Verstraeten Vaccine Safety Datalink Study, the initial findings of the generation zero analysis uncovered by SafeMinds through FOIA Requests<sup>34</sup> found "Autism risks were the highest of all the diagnostic codes, with a relative risk at one month of 11.35 between the high and zero exposure groups." Dr. Verstraeten appears never to have written this initial data up in a report. Instead he worked with his CDC colleagues to produce a second generation of the data which was presented at Simpsonwood.<sup>35</sup>

The report generated from the 'generation one' data reduced the relative risk by more than 75 percent (but still found problems with exposure to thimerosal through infant vaccines.) By the time this data was presented publicly for the first time, at the Boston meeting of the IOM, Dr.

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<sup>32</sup> The CDC released data in March 2012 indicated the prevalence of autism of children born in the United States in 2000 is 1 in 88, with the rate for boys at 1 in 54. This is a 73 percent increase from their first report in 2007.

<sup>33</sup> While there is no reference to the thimerosal debate in the CDC report, the 2000 US birth cohort would have been exposed to thimerosal in their infant vaccines, while Denmark removed all preservatives from their children's vaccines in 1992.

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.safeminds.org/research/library/GenerationZeroPowerPoint.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> [http://www.safeminds.org/government-affairs/foia/Simpsonwood\\_Transcript.pdf](http://www.safeminds.org/government-affairs/foia/Simpsonwood_Transcript.pdf)

Thomas Verstraeten had negotiated and accepted a job with a vaccine manufacturer in his home country of Belgium, out of the reach of US authorities including Congress.

The IOM proved unable to separate their desire to protect immunization policies from their charge to investigate vaccine injuries and neurodevelopmental delays such as autism. The federal investment in research as noted by Dr. Weldon has put too heavy an emphasis on epidemiology, which cannot truly answer the question, while ignoring more objective studies such as laboratory, animal and clinical research. (And evidence indicates that the CDC may have directed the IOM through their contracting mechanism to develop the conclusion the agency desired. A transcript<sup>36</sup> of the January 12, 2001 closed door meeting of the IOM panel (before the actual review had begun) that was leaked had provided several statements by the IOM coordinator Dr. Kathleen Stratton and Committee Chair, Dr. Marie McCormick. They include:

From Page 33: Dr. McCormick: *...[CDC] wants us to declare, well these things are pretty safe on a population basis...*

From Page 74: Dr. Stratton: *...The point of no return, the line we will not cross in public policy is pull the vaccine, change the schedule. We could say it is time to revisit this, but we would never recommend that level. Even recommending research is recommendations for policy. We wouldn't say compensate, we wouldn't say pull the vaccine, we wouldn't say stop the program.*

Page 97: Dr. McCormick: *...we are not ever going to come down that [autism] is a true side effect.*

In March 2004, the IOM Immunization Safety Review Committee in an egregious exclusion of 'hard data' of a number of animal studies in favor of solely rely the CDC funded epidemiological evidence, would (including those in which Thorsen played a role) issue a report that concluded "The body of epidemiological evidence favors the rejection of a causal relationship between thimerosal-containing vaccines and autism."

The CDC which is responsible for promoting immunizations, funded all of the studies that were used by the IOM, who was under contract with the CDC to evaluate the possible links between vaccines and autism. The IOM conclusions, which according to the transcript references were pre-determined, (and strongly influenced by CDC) were used to deny justice to 5,000 families with claims in the Vaccine Injury Compensation Program and to deter future research.

In a contradiction to the IOM report, a June 2004 private email, the IOM Chair, Dr. McCormick stated, "The committee accepts that under certain conditions, infections and heavy metals, including thimerosal, can injure the nervous system."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> <http://www.putchildrenfirst.org/media/6.4.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.putchildrenfirst.org/media/6.17.pdf>

**Dr. Bernadine Healy** a former Director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) the largest U.S. federal agency responsible for conducting and supporting medical research and a highly respected research scientist published an article in US News and World Report in which she stated, “So as a trigger, vaccines carry a ring of both historical and biological plausibility.”<sup>38</sup>

Dr. Healy stated in a CBS interview in 2008:<sup>39</sup>

*“...there is a completely expressed concern -- that they don't want to pursue a hypothesis [vaccine=autism] because that hypothesis could be damaging to the public health community at large by scaring people. First of all, I think the public's smarter than that. The public values vaccines. But more importantly, I don't think you should ever turn your back on any scientific hypothesis because you're afraid of what it might show... the more you delve into it, if you look at the basic science, if you look at the research that's been done in animals, if you also look at some of these individual cases, and if you look at the evidence that there is no link, what I come away with is the question [whether vaccines contribute to autism] has not been answered.”*

With the Thorsen indictment, one sees the credibility of all of the data the CDC funded to be questionable. One can only ask what evidence remains if the Verstraeten paper and all of the Thorsen papers were struck from the debate. A full consideration for a retraction of the 21 Thorsen authored papers funded in the CDC-Denmark project is needed. A reconsideration of the effect of the removal of these papers from government’s charge that vaccines and their ingredients have no connection to the epidemic increase in autism rates to 1 in 88 children born in 2000 is warranted.

#### **About the Author: Beth Clay**

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<sup>38</sup> <http://health.usnews.com/health-news/managing-your-healthcare/brain-and-behavior/articles/2008/04/10/fighting-the-autism-vaccine-war>

<sup>39</sup> [http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-500803\\_162-4090144-500803.html](http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-500803_162-4090144-500803.html)

## Exhibit 1

**Bibliography of Poul Thorsen Autism Papers**

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