

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK/Bernard Rimland, Ph.D.

News and Notes

The Editor's Notebook column is typically devoted to a single, more or less technical issue in the area of autism research. This one will be a bit different in that several topics are covered:

Address to the California State Senate

On June 8th, I was invited to address the California State Senate in a ceremony recognizing Autism Awareness Week. Here are my remarks:

Distinguished Members of the Senate:

I want to thank and commend this body for its continuing recognition and support of autistic children and their families.

When my now 39-year-old son was five, we were told he was a hopeless case and were advised to institutionalize him. We didn't.

Today, while he is by no means fully recovered, he is a fine, happy and well-adjusted person who has developed into an outstanding artist whose paintings are widely admired and in great demand.

A major factor in his extraordinary improvement was the application of the technique of behavior modification, a specialized form of teaching pioneered by my good friend Professor Ivar Lovaas of UCLA, who was honored by you last year at this time and place. I founded the Autism Society of America in 1965 largely to increase awareness of the promise of the method among both parents and professionals.

It has taken a quarter of a century, but now the techniques of intensive behavior modification are being used with great success with young autistic children here in Sacramento and throughout the world. The F.E.A.T. program in Sacramento provides an outstanding example of the great improvement that can be achieved if the techniques of behavioral intervention are applied early enough.

Each dollar spent in providing intensive behavior modification to young children will save many special education dollars in later years. I hope that even in this age of tight budgets, sufficient dollars will be found to invest in the future of these autistic children, not only for their benefit, but in order to save many more tax dollars; not only on their future education but also in reducing the likelihood that they will require lifetime care.

What I am going to say next has implications far beyond autism. The implications extend to the health and well-being of all Californians:

The second extremely important intervention that made an enormous difference in my son's life was the use of high dosage vitamin B6. I have been a full-time researcher my entire adult life, and research on the efficacy of vitamins and minerals, as opposed to drugs, is a major theme of my work in autism and in other fields as well. There are now 18 consecutive studies, conducted in six countries, all of which strongly support the use of high dosage vitamin B6 in the treatment of autis-

tic children. No studies have failed to show benefits, and no significant adverse effects have been seen. No drug even comes close to vitamin B6 in efficacy and safety. Yet, when a mother takes her autistic child to a physician, drugs, not vitamins, almost invariably will be given. In autism as in other disorders, the medical establishment, for both ideological and financial reasons, has been dragging its feet. Only very recently, belatedly and reluctantly, has the medical establishment been compelled by public pressure to recognize the many benefits of nutrition and nutritional supplements.

It is my fervent hope that those of you in this body will use the enormous power and influence vested in you by the people of California to give careful attention to the evidence, accumulating from every direction, that a vast variety of human illness, ranging from autism to asthma to allergies to heart disease, cancer, AIDS and so forth, can respond more positively to inexpensive natural substances, such as vitamins, minerals and amino acids, than to those toxic but highly profitable chemicals known as drugs. Prescription drugs cause 150,000 deaths per year in the U.S., and many millions of expensive hospital days.

Many in the medical and pharmaceutical establishments have attempted to drown out the voices of researchers such as myself who recognize that all human disorders, including autism, are best treated by providing substances which are normally present in the human body, rather than trying merely to suppress the symptoms through the use of expensive, often harmful, but highly profitable prescription drugs.

Thank you.

Lawsuit: Autism Research Institute vs. Autism Society of America

The Autism Research Institute has initiated a lawsuit against the Autism Society of America (ASA). I had hoped and expected that the problem could be resolved without going to court, and had tried to keep it rather low-key. But now, as a result of its being mentioned in the *ASA Advocate*, and on the Internet, it is no longer a low-profile item.

Here is what happened:

In 1986 I was asked for advice by the production team that was planning the film *Rain Man*. I provided a great deal of advice and consultation (it was largely on my suggestion that Dustin Hoffman played an autistic rather than a retarded savant). I didn't charge MGM at all for this help, and when the film appeared, they credited me with being the chief technical advisor on autism.

When the film became a hit, Dustin Hoffman and director Barry Levinson asked MGM to send \$50,000 as a donation to "Dr. Rimland's organization." The money was sent to ASA, by mistake, by someone at MGM who knew I was the founder of ASA. ASA promptly spent the \$50,000. Our attempts to reclaim it at that time were unsuccessful, because ASA had no money.

Now that ASA has nearly a million dollars in the bank, as a result of several windfall bequests, we attempted to collect the money that had been erroneously sent to ASA. Letters from me, and from Dustin Hoffman, Barry Levinson and former MGM Vice President Lew O'Neil failed to induce ASA to return the money to us. This is particularly unfortunate, because the money is to be used to support the research of the Autism Research Institute, especially our Defeat Autism Now! project.

After five or more attempts by myself, and one attempt by our attorney, to have ASA pay, all of which were refused, the matter was turned over to the Federal Court in Maryland, and will now be resolved by a jury. (If you would like to receive copies of the letters to ASA from Dustin Hoffman, Barry Levinson and Lew O'Neil, please send an SASE with "Rain Man lawsuit" written in the lower left corner.)

—B.R.

Assistant Editor's Note

Luckily for the staff of the Autism Research Institute, Dr. Rimland isn't very good at estimating how long his editorials will be when they're typeset. This leaves us room on this page to sneak in a few news items he was too modest to report.

The first is that when Dr. Rimland addressed the California State Senate on June 8, it was on the occasion of his receiving a commendation from Governor Pete Wilson and an award from the Senate for his work on autism. This award, the second to be given by the State of California, is in commemoration of Autism Awareness Week. (Last year the award was given to Ivar Lovaas, for his work on intensive early intervention.)

The second item is that on May 19th, Dr. Rimland received another award, the first Princeton/Eden Research Award, for "excellence in research related to the etiology of autism." He was the first recipient of this award, for which he was unanimously selected by a committee of faculty members of Princeton University and the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton who are also parents of autistic children.

The talk Dr. Rimland gave upon accepting the reward, "The Future of Autism Research," is being published by the Eden Institute, and we will let you know when copies are available.

Also honored with a Princeton/Eden Research Award at the ceremony was Dr. Eric Schopler, who received an award for "excellence in service to people with autism." Dr. Schopler is the Founder of the renowned TEACCH program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the Editor of the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*.

The staff of the Autism Research Institute congratulate both Dr. Rimland and Dr. Schopler on their awards!

—A.B.