

# Autism Research Review

I N T E R N A T I O N A L

A quarterly publication of the Autism Research Institute

Reviewing biomedical and educational research in the field of autism and related disorders

## Defeat Autism Now! manual ready; Chicago meeting planned

by Bernard Rimland, Ph.D.

The Autism Research Institute has begun mailing out the long-awaited consensus report of the Defeat Autism Now! (DAN!) conference held last year in Dallas. As readers of the ARRI know, the DAN! conference brought together many of the outstanding researchers and physicians in the autism world, from the U.S. and Europe, to share their findings and ideas on the best way to identify and treat the various biomedical problems which are among the causes of autism.

Input from the Dallas conference attendees was compiled and edited by two widely experienced and highly respected individuals, Sidney M. Baker, M.D., and Jon Pangborn, Ph.D. The 40-page manual ("Clinical Assessment Options for Children with Autism and Related Disorders") is a state-of-the-art compendium of the most appropriate biomedical laboratory tests, the procedures for submitting samples to the laboratories, the preferred labs for each test, flow charts for helping decide on the best diagnostic and therapeutic strategy, and much more.

The protocol represents a giant step forward in identifying and treating the root causes of many cases of autism.

This is a very exciting time. Decades ago we left behind the theory that bad mothering

causes autism. That was a bad idea, and I'm pleased that my 1964 book, *Infantile Autism*, is widely credited as a major reason for its abandonment. Now we are leaving behind another bad and non-productive idea: the notion that drugs developed for other problems—depression, schizophrenia, weight loss, hyperactivity, etc.—are the treatments of choice for autism. Not so!

**PROTOCOLS AVAILABLE.** To order a copy of the DAN! protocol, send \$25.00 (California residents add \$1.75 tax).

**CHICAGO DAN! MEETING.** A tutorial seminar for health care practitioners, based on the DAN! protocol, has been scheduled at a site near Chicago's O'Hare

Airport for June 15 and 16, 1996. The instructors will include Drs. Baker and Pangborn and renowned immunologist Sudhir Gupta, M.D., Ph.D., whose pioneering research on IGIV treatment of autism has gained world-wide attention. Representatives of the various laboratories will be present to explain procedures and interpret findings. Since there will be limited space, preference will be given to physicians and other practitioners who wish to use the protocol in their practice. Non-practitioners will be admitted on a space-available basis. For an application form, write the Autism Research Institute, 4182 Adams Avenue, San Diego, CA 92116, or fax ARI at (619) 563-6840. Urge your doctor to attend!

## Clozapine: do risks outweigh benefits?

The drug clozapine may effectively treat severe self-injury, according to a new study. However, the drug's potential side effects are so serious that its use will probably be very limited.

Ron Hammock and colleagues recently reported on a 93-week trial in which they gave clozapine (commonly known by the brand name Clozaril) to a 40-year-old, profoundly retarded, blind man. The man's aggression and severe head-banging had not been reduced significantly by behavioral treatments or other drugs.

Hammock et al. raised the drug dosage gradually, and report that the man's aggression dropped to near-zero levels at a dose of 200 mg, while his rate of self-injury dropped to 14 percent of its former level by the time the dose was raised to 225 mg. They also note that "there was a consistent increase of self-injury when the dosage was reduced."

However, the man (who had no history of seizures) suffered seven seizures during clozapine treatment. Additional side effects included excess salivation, mild constipation, and some nausea.

Other reports suggest that seizures may be a fairly common side effect of clozapine treatment. Another rare but severe side effect (not seen in this subject) is agranulocytosis, a blood disorder that can be fatal. Clozapine was withdrawn from the market in 1976 because of this side effect, but was later reintroduced on the condition that patients undergo weekly monitoring. Clozapine is usually used to treat

schizophrenics who have not responded to other drugs. Unlike many other psychotropic drugs, it does not appear to cause tardive dyskinesia (an often severe and sometimes permanent disorder that causes involuntary movements of the lips, face, tongue, hands and feet).

### How does clozapine work?

Hammock et al. note that drugs commonly used to treat self-injury work primarily by blocking a dopamine receptor known as D2, while clozapine blocks both D2 and another receptor known as D1. Research on rats and monkeys suggests, they say, that some self-injury is linked to supersensitivity of D1 receptors.

"Drugs with D1-blocking properties similar to clozapine but without the potentially severe side effects of agranulocytosis and seizures need to be developed," the researchers conclude. Such drugs, in addition to being safer than clozapine, might be cheaper: treatment with clozapine now costs around \$9,000 a year (\$4,000 for the drug, and an additional \$5,000 for the required monitoring).

"The effect of clozapine on self-injurious behavior," Ron G. Hammock, Stephen R. Schroeder, and William R. Levine; *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, Vol. 25, No. 6, December 1995, pp. 611-626. Address: Ron Hammock, 1320 North McCabe Road, Winfield, KS 67156.

"Clozapine and the treatment of schizophrenia," Patricia B. Higgins; *Health and Social Work*, Vol. 20, No. 2, May 1995. Address: Patricia Higgins, Clinical Studies Unit, Western State Hospital, Box 2500, Staunton, VA 24401.

### PBS-TV AUTISM SPECIAL

Starting on Thursday evening, April 11, many PBS television stations will broadcast Part II of the acclaimed "People in Motion" series, which will feature a number of talented autistic individuals including Temple Grandin and my 39-year-old autistic son Mark and his artwork. (I haven't seen the show yet, but I understand that my wife Gloria and I, and our dog, Lady, may be included.)

When Mark was six, we were told, "Hopeless! Institutionalize him!" At seven, he was still in diapers. See him—and his fine artworks—yourself. (There is a high probability that *Parade* magazine will also feature Mark's art in the near future.)

Although the PBS show will initially be broadcast on April 11, local stations may show it later. Check with your local PBS station for exact date and time.

—Bernard Rimland