LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Vitamin B6

To the Editor:

[Our son] Brandon is 4 years old. At this stage in his development, his teacher noticed that his hyperactivity level was not diminishing as she might expect. She uttered the word ADHD, which I was always prepared to hear some day. His behavioral therapist suggested that vitamin therapy was worth a try and gave me the phone number of your Institute. Once I received the paper regarding [vitamin B6 and magnesium] therapy, I was very impressed by the statement that this therapy is just as effective as Ritalin, with no or little side effects.

Here is a list of the way this vitamin has helped to improve my son's ability to cope wth the world around him: little or no attention-getting behaviors, activity level has decreased, language clarity and depth of use of language, sequencing of events, focusing in class, can be reasoned with regarding his negative behavior, need to control diminished, sits on mom's lap to eat, no longer urinating on his bedroom floor. My husband and I cannot thank you and your Institute enough for this incredible therapy suggestion.

Ann and Randy Schimka
San Diego, CA

Waardenburg-Shah syndrome

To the Editor:

I am interested in hearing about any individuals with autistic spectrum disorders who also have been diagnosed with Waardenburg-Shah syndrome. I now have two families in which autism and Waardenburg-Shah co-occur. This is a rare condition but is interesting as it gives a genetic basis for a gut-brain link through an abnormalitiy of the endothelin-3 gene which is important in both neural crest formation and the development of the enteric nervous system.

Kenneth Aitken, Ph.D.

Editor's Note: We would appreciate hearing from any readers with information about autistic individuals with Waardenburg-Shah syndrome.

Vaccination standards

To the Editor:

Voices of Safety International (VOSI) is a three-year-old standards-writing organization that writes standards only to benefit the safety and health of people and the environment.

See www.voicesofsafety.com to learn how we are using a federal law to force government regulatory agencies to be more responsive to people rather than as they currently are to special interests. To see what we are doing on the issue of vaccinations click on "Public Health", then "VOSI V50.2 standard guide for eliminating mercury and the triple vaccines (DPT, MMR)", then "Review Standard", then "View Research Report", which shows that children receiving all vaccines are 8 times more likely to become autistic and 14 times more likely to become learning disabled than children who were never vaccinated. Please ask your friends to see these astonishing facts.

Donald Meserlian
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Editor's note: Don Meserlian, VOSI chairman, is the father of an autistic adult son, and has been a long-time effective activist in health and safety issues.

Pepcid study reports encouraging results

The over-the-counter drug famotidine (Pepcid) significantly improves the behavior of some children with pervasive developmental disorder (PDD), according to a new study that confirms earlier findings by the same researchers (see ARRI 11/3).

Linda Linday and colleagues treated nine boys, ranging in age from 3 to 8, diagnosed with PDD. None of the children were taking other medications at the time of the study. The researchers administered famotidine (2 mg/kg/day, or a maximum daily dose of 100 mg) to the subjects in a randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled, crossover study, and report that 4 of the children showed significant behavioral improvement. Caregivers reported increased affection, and decreases in lethargy, irritability, and repetitive speech. However, children with marked stereotyped behaviors did not respond to the drug.

The researchers note that that because their study did not include endoscopy and their subjects did not have significant gastrointestinal symptoms, they cannot determine if improvements were due simply to treatment of asymptomatic esophagitis. However, Linday notes that famotidine blocks histamine-2 receptors and that "there is substantial evidence that histamine serves as a neurotransmitter and neuromodulator in the brain."

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"Famotidine treatment of young children with autistic spectrum disorders: Pilot research using single subject research design," L. A. Linday, J. A. Tsiouris, I. L. Cohen, R. Shindledecker, and R. DeCresce, *Journal of Neural Transmission*, Vol. 108, No. 5, May 2001, pp. 593-611. Additional information is available online at www.drlinday.com.

More genes tied to autism

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genes that play a role in brain and nervous system development. The gene is located in an area of chromosome 7 that other studies have linked to autism. Thomas Wassink and colleagues tested 135 autistic individuals and their families, and found two families in which one parent and an autistic child, but not a non-autistic sibling, carried a mutated variant of WNT2. None of the 160 control subjects had the mutated WNT2 variant. The researchers also found evidence that a more common variant of WNT2 could contribute to susceptibility to a subtype of autism associated with severe language impairment.

"We hypothesize," they say, "that rare mutations occur in the WNT2 gene that significantly increase susceptibility to autism even when present in single copies, while a more common WNT2 allele (or alleles) not yet identified may exist that contributes to the disorder to a lesser degree."

While these and other genes may contribute to autism, it is increasingly clear that no single "autism gene" exists. Edwin Cook, Jr. noted recently that "the first phase of genome-wide screens has not revealed definitive linkage," but he says that continued analysis should yield more information about specific genes that cause susceptibility to autism. He also notes that researchers have uncovered the genetic roots of several autistic-like disorders including fragile X syndrome and Rett syndrome.

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"Autism: evidence of association with adenosine deaminase genetic polymorphism," N. Bottini, D. De Luca, P. Saccucci, A. Fiumara, M. Elia, M. C. Porfirio, P. Lucarelli, and P. Curatolo, *Neurogenetics*, Vol. 3, No. 2, March 2001, pp. 111-113. Address: N. Bottini, Department of Internal Medicine, Tor Vergata, University of Rome, Rome, Italy.

—and—

"Genetically determined low maternal serum dopamine beta-hydroxylase levels and the etiology of autism spectrum disorders," P. D. Robinson, C. K. Schutz, F. Macciardi, B. N. White, and J. J. Holden, *American Journal of Medical Genetics*, Vol. 100, No. 1, April 15, 2001, pp. 30-36. Address: P. D. Robinson, Department of Biology, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.

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"Evidence supporting WNT2 as an autism susceptibility gene," Thomas H. Wassink, Joseph Piven, Veronica J. Vieland, Jian Huang, Ruth E. Swiderski, Jennifer Pietila, Terry Braun, Gretel Beck, Susan E. Folstein, Jonathon L. Haines, and Val C. Sheffield, *American Journal of Medical Genetics*, May 17, 2001. Address: Thomas H. Wassink, University of Iowa College of Medicine, Psychiatry Research/MEB, Iowa City, IA 52242.

—and—

"Genetics of autism," E. H. Cook, *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, Vol. 10, No. 2, April 2001, pp. 333-350. Address: E. H. Cook, Department of Psychiatry, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL 60637.