

Editor's Notebook: Bernard Rimland, Ph.D.**What I have learned: Four and a half decades as a parent and researcher**

Keynote address by Bernard Rimland, founder of the Autism Society of America (ASA), at the 36th annual conference of ASA, San Diego, California, July 19, 2001.

I am a researcher. I have been a full-time professional research scientist my entire adult life.

Let's do a quick research study right now: If you are the parent of an autistic child 10 years old or younger, please stand up. If your child was normal at birth, had eye contact, was developing speech, and was normal in other ways, for a year or more, then began to regress after a vaccination, and you believe the vaccination probably caused the autism, please raise your hand.

Now look around. I've asked that question of a dozen or more audiences in the past few years, and the results are always the same. As you can see, the vast majority of you suspect the vaccines.

My son Mark was born in 1956. It was obvious from birth that this perfectly normal looking infant had something drastically wrong with him. I had earned my Ph.D. in experimental psychology three years earlier, and had never encountered the word autism. Our pediatrician, with 35 years of experience, had never heard of autism either. Autism was extremely rare then—it is extremely common now.

Some supposed experts will tell you that the increase reflects only a greater awareness. That is nonsense. Any experienced pediatrician, teacher, or school official will confirm what the studies tell us: there is a *real* increase in autism, and the numbers are huge, and growing. The epidemic is serious and worldwide.

In the past 10 years, the number of required vaccines prior to age 2 has risen from 8 to 22. A coincidence? I don't think so.

Soon after my book *Infantile Autism: The syndrome and its implications for a neural theory of behavior* was published in 1964, I began to hear from other parents. Many told me their children were normal until getting a triple vaccine—the DPT shot. In 1965, I began systematically collecting data on the symptoms and causes of autism. In 1967—34 years ago—I began querying the parents about the child's response to the DPT shot. Many reported marked deterioration. Being aware of the problem with mercury, I also asked about dental work during the pregnancy.

During the past few years the Autism Research Institute has been flooded with an upsurge of pleas for help from parents throughout the world, from wherever the World Health Organization Vaccine Guidelines are followed.

Despite the very obvious and extremely severe epidemic of autism, mainstream medi-

cine continues to insist that there really is no epidemic at all, that it's merely an illusion that we parents have succumbed to because of greater awareness of autism, and if there were an epidemic, it couldn't possibly be caused by the vaccines, despite the fact that many contain grossly excessive amounts of mercury, one of the most poisonous substances on earth.

Mainstream medicine's totally inappropriate response to the epidemic of autism we are now experiencing is typical of mainstream medicine's response to the problem of au-

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tism, and is very characteristic of what has been going on for the nearly five decades I have been involved with autism.

Let me make it very clear that I am certainly not condemning all physicians. There are many truly outstanding and well-informed physicians who really care about autistic children and their families. Later today there will be a panel of such physicians, who are also parents of autistic children, speaking on the methods they use to bring about remarkable improvement in the children in their families and in their practices.

Nevertheless, mainstream medicine, by which I mean such groups as the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Association, the National Institute of Mental Health, the American Psychiatric Association, and similar organizations, have harmed rather than helped autistic children and their families from Day One:

- They supported the scientifically invalid psychoanalytically-based theories which held the mother responsible for causing autism through her supposedly hostile attitude toward the child.

- They ridiculed the use of behavior modification, the most uniformly beneficial treatment for autism, claiming that it neglected the deep-seated emotional blocks that were supposedly at the root of autism.

- They ignored and continue to ignore the long series of studies conducted both in the U.S. and Europe showing that the elimination of foods containing gluten and casein from the diet brings about marked improvement in many autistic children.

- They have consistently ignored the series of 18 consecutive studies, conducted by researchers in 6 countries, which show that almost half of all autistic children and adults

respond favorably to high doses of vitamin B6 and magnesium, with no adverse effects reported. Eleven of these studies were double-blind, placebo-crossover experiments. (There is no drug which comes close to B6/magnesium in terms of safety, efficacy, and positive research findings.)

- They routinely prescribe harmful, sometimes deadly drugs such as fenfluramine and Ritalin, which are far more dangerous, less effective and less rational than the nutritional supplements and special diets that well-informed parents and physicians employ.

- They have spent tens of millions of dollars on non-productive lines of research, while virtually no money at all has been for research on the methods of alternative medicine, which are far more promising in terms of both safety and efficacy. (What they call "alternative medicine" I call "intelligent medicine.")

And now they have done it again! In May, 2001 the American Academy of Pediatrics issued its guidelines on "Diagnosis and Management of Autism." The AAP guidelines are a very patronizing document, the publication of which might have made sense if standard, mainstream pediatricians had achieved even a modicum of success in the treatment of autism. Approaches which have been demonstrated to work on thousands of children, and which are very thoroughly documented in the research literature, are dismissed by the AAP in a few pages of distorted and inaccurate condescending prose.

We parents have never been able to count on mainstream medicine to protect our children from autism, nor to employ effective means for diagnosing and treating autistic children. Mainstream medicine in fact promotes the very programs of excessive vaccinations which are in all likelihood the primary cause of the present epidemic of autism.

The Autism Research Institute responded by launching, in 1995, its Defeat Autism Now! (DAN!) project, which left the futile efforts of conventional medicine in the dust and pursued a breathtakingly imaginative new concept: "Do what works!" The results have been extremely gratifying. The seven subsequent DAN! Conferences have been attended by thousands of parents and many hundreds of physicians. We hear daily of children who have left autism behind.

This afternoon you will hear a special panel of four DAN! doctors who have achieved remarkable success in treating hundreds of autistic children, including three doctors who have successfully treated their own children. (Copies of the 2-hour, 56-minute videotape of the DAN! Doctors' Panel are available from ARI at \$20; California residents include \$1.50 tax. See insert for more information.)