LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SIB due to constipation

To the Editor:

It is with great pleasure that I am writing you today about my son's dramatic decrease in self-injurious behavior (SIB) after a simple treatment for constipation suggested by Dr. Lewis in Montana. My son took milk of magnesia twice a day and a suppository in the evening for three days. By the second day a "dramatic" change of behavior was noted. This was about 10 days ago. The positive effects seem to be persisting and all signs point toward the treatment as the origin of change. My son also has seemed more peaceful and more willing to participate in activities.

The purpose of my letter is two-fold: One, to thank you for your suggestion to call Drs. Lewis, Jepson, and Krigsman, and two, to let you know that this appears to be yet another case of self-aggression caused in large part by undetected pain.

A Montana Dad

Fears for the future

To the Editor:

Sunday, February 23, 2003, I was home in the early afternoon with my son Eric who is six feet tall, weighs 150-160 pounds, and is 18 years old. Eric was eating when he started to have a tantrum. Normally I run in one of the bathrooms and lock the door until Eric calms down. Usually it works, but this day I couldn't get into the bathroom door to lock it so I ran to the front door. Eric followed me, head butted me, and pulled my hair.

I then ran outside to get help from my neighbor. Eric followed me. When I got to the front door of my neighbor, Eric bit my left hand and had two of my fingers in his mouth clamping down with his teeth.

Later, at the hospital, the doctors found that my left index finger had the tip of the bone amputated from the rest of my finger. Eric had actually bitten through the bone of my hand. This isn't the first time that Eric has attacked me, my wife, or my daughter.

I have been fighting since 1995 regarding the MMR vaccine link to autism. In 1998, our organization, the Autism Autoimmunity Project, was founded, and to date we have raised a bit over $120,000 for research. We could do a lot more for children with autism but most of the millions of dollars of research funds are spent on genetic and drug studies... and very little on the immune and gastrointestinal research unless it is by small organizations like ours.

What will happen over the next 5, 10, and 15 years? Will we get the treatments we need, or will we face a bleak landscape of children growing into adults and not being helped? Our family has to face the prospect that if we can't help, Eric will be sent to an institution where he will die.

Ray Gallup

Editor's Note: Ray called us a few days ago to add that Dr. Krigsman had performed a colonoscopy/endoscopy on his son that revealed an esophagal erosion the size of a quarter—probably very painful, and one logical explanation for Eric's SIB. Says Ray, "Dr. Krigsman like Dr. Wakefield is a terrific doctor and a beautiful human being who cares about children with autism." Ray's story, and the preceding letter, dramatically illustrate his point about the critical need for more research into the gastrointestinal and immune factors involved in autism, as well as the possible legalization of marijuana as a treatment for self-injury and aggression (see page 3).

China DAN! update

(cont. from p. 2)

about the rapidly spreading epidemic of SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) has caused indefinite postponement of the conference. Plans are underway to provide a teleconference in English and Chinese instead.

If you have relatives or colleagues in China who are interested in autism and would like to know about the forthcoming conference, please contact Dr. Jang at miriamjangmd@comcast.net. You may also wish to visit Dr. Jang's website, at: www.miriamjangmd.com.

'Super peptide' a highly effective Candida killer

Many autistic children suffer from chronic overcolonization by *Candida albicans*, a yeast that can cause both physical and behavioral symptoms. Unfortunately, Candida can be very difficult to control using currently available treatment methods, such as nystatin. However, researchers at the firm Zengen, Inc., are reporting that they have developed a "super peptide" capable of effectively killing candida organisms.

Paulo Grieco et al. synthesized a novel analogue of a-melanocyte stimulating hormone (a-MSH), a substance that modulates inflammatory and immune responses. They report that the peptide killed 99.7 percent of Candida cells over repeated experiments.

Grieco says, "The power of this new a-MSH analogue against C. Albicans appears to be significantly greater than any other known peptides, as it is super-potent, super-stable and super-durable." Ettore Novellino, a co-author of the research, comments, "Clearly there is more research to be conducted... [but] we are excited about the enormous clinical implications of our discovery."

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"Scientists develop 'super peptide' that kills Candida albicans," press release, Zengen, Inc., February 20, 2003, http://www.eurekalert.org.

More findings point to dangers of mercury to the developing brain

A new study adds to the evidence showing that children exposed to mercury before birth are at risk for language and cognitive problems.

G. B. Ramirez and colleagues studied children in Tagum, an area in the Philippines where residents are exposed to high levels of mercury because of mining activity. The researchers collected data on 48 children's cord blood and meconium mercury levels at birth, their head circumference at birth, and the length of time they were breastfed, and then measured their cognitive and linguistic ability at age 2 using the CAT/CLAMS test (which combines the Cognitive Adaptive Test and the Clinical Linguistic Auditory Milestone Scale). Subjects were compared to controls not exposed to high levels of environmental mercury.

Ramirez et al. found that mercury levels in cord blood at the time of birth were negatively correlated with CAT/CLAMS at two years of age. In addition, head circumference at birth was negatively correlated with levels of mercury in the hair of the Tagum subjects at two years of age. The researchers report that control children scored higher than the children from Tagum on both the CAT and the CLAMS, and on tests of expressive language and full-scale development. "Fifteen percent of Tagum subjects had global delay," they note, "versus 5.48 percent in Saranggani controls." Length of breastfeeding did not influence test results.

Ramirez and colleagues conclude that while other factors may play a role in their findings, "The study suggests that prenatal mercury exposure is correlated with lower scores in neurodevelopmental screening," and in linguistic scores in particular.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued a report several years ago warning that ten percent of women in America have mercury exposures high enough to put their offspring at risk of having neurological problems. Environmental contributors to prenatal mercury exposure include certain types of fish, industrial plants, and waste sites. Until recently, the RhoGam shots many women received during pregnancy also contained the mercury-laden preservative thimerosal. *(See related articles, pages 1 and 2.)*

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"Tagum study II: follow-up study at two years of age after prenatal exposure to mercury," G. B. Ramirez, O. Pagulayan, H. Akagi, A. Francisco Rivera, L. V. Lee, A. Berroya, M. C. Vince Cruz, and D. Casintahan, *Pediatrics*, Vol. 111, No. 3, March 2003, e289-95. Address: G. B. Ramirez, Research Development Office, Philippine Children's Medical Center, Quezon City, Philippines, rdo@hiss.pcmc.org.ph.