

Phenobarbital: IQ scores drop

The anti-seizure medication phenobarbital may lower children's IQs, according to a report in the February issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

In a study of 217 children who had suffered fever-related seizures, researchers Jacqueline Farwell and Deborah Hirtz found that children who took phenobarbital for approximately two years after their seizures had IQ scores an average of 8.4 points lower than children taking a placebo. Six months after both the drug and the placebo were discontinued, the scores of the phenobarbital group were still lower than those of the control subjects.

While the study also showed that phenobarbital was relatively ineffective in preventing seizures from recurring, the researchers stress that their test subjects had fever-related seizures rather than epilepsy. (Fever-related or "febrile" seizures are fairly common, and while they may recur, they almost never develop into epilepsy.) Farwell and Hirtz say their findings indicate that phenobarbital "should not be used for febrile seizures," but not that it should be discontinued in individuals with epilepsy.

They add that parents of children taking phenobarbital should *not* stop the drug without consulting a physician. Stopping phenobarbital suddenly can result in severe seizures and could be life-threatening.

Tegretol: moisture can reduce effectiveness

Officials are asking manufacturers of a second anti-seizure medication, carbamazepine (commonly known by its brand name, Tegretol) to re-design the drug's packaging to be moisture-proof. New research indicates that the drug can lose up to one-third of its effectiveness if stored in damp areas such as bathroom medicine cabinets.

Behavior therapy reimbursed

A New York family has successfully appealed an insurance company's denial of payments for behavioral therapy of their autistic daughter.

The child was treated by both speech and behavior therapists. (The mother's article about her daughter's treatment and recovery appeared in the August 1989 *Readers Digest*.) The insurance company originally denied reimbursement for both forms of treatment, but later allowed reimbursement for the speech therapy. The appeal, very thorough and compelling, was successful in gaining reimbursement for behavior therapy also.

Copies of documents available

Families having difficulty with their own insurance companies may wish to have a copy of "the LeGrand appeal." Send \$4.50

to ARRI to cover copying and postage costs.

Also available is the court decision requiring insurance company payment in the Kunin case, on the grounds that autism is not a mental illness (ARRI 2/4). \$4.00 will cover copying and postage.

Policies may be rewritten

In its review of legal developments in the 1980s, *Clinical Psychiatry News* (February 1990) noted that "a few courts ruled that certain psychiatric diagnoses, such as autism and bipolar disorder, were not mental illnesses and should be reimbursed by insurers at the same rate as medical illness." However, the CPN went on to say, "Insurance companies might rewrite their policies to exclude these psychiatric disorders. This in fact happened in the case involving bipolar disorder."

Announcements

Families needed for Johns Hopkins Research

The Behavioral Genetics Research Center (BGRC) at Johns Hopkins University Hospital and the Kennedy Institute is seeking families with children who carry or are affected with the fragile X syndrome to participate in clinical research projects being funded by the National Institutes of Health.

All families will receive free cognitive, social, and behavioral evaluation as well as financial compensation. Free cytogenetic and DNA testing may also be available. Families with affected or unaffected female children are especially needed. All families are encouraged to contact the BGRC to receive updated information about the fragile X syndrome.

For further information contact the project coordinator, Valerie Simon, M.A., or

the project directors, Allan Reiss, M.D., and Lisa Freund, Ph.D. Call collect or write the Kennedy Institute, Behavioral Genetics Unit, Rm. 103, 707 North Broadway Avenue, Baltimore, MD 20215, (301) 550-9321 or 550-9313 (leave message).

TEACCH Conference set

The 11th annual TEACCH Conference will be held May 17 and 18 at the Omni-Europa Hotel in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. The topic of this year's conference will be "Assessment and Management of Behavior Problems in Children with Autism."

The fee for the conference is \$60 for North Carolina residents, and \$100 for non-residents. Reservation deadline is May 4. For more information or to obtain registration forms, call Helen Garrison, (919) 966-2173, or write to: TEACCH Conference Coordinator, CB# 7180, Medical School Wing E, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-7180.

NIH report available in May

The final report of the Consensus Development Conference on Treatment of Destructive Behavior, sponsored by the National Institute of Health, is nearing completion. Expected publication date is May 1.

The conference, held in Bethesda in September 1989, dealt with behavior modification, drugs and other means of dealing with self-injurious and assaultive behavior (see ARRI 3/4).

The final report will exceed 100 pages. A brochure highlighting the conclusions of the conference is available now. Either or both documents may be requested from Dr. James G. Hill, Chief, Office of Science Policy and Analysis, NIH-NICHD Bldg. 31, Room 2A10, Bethesda, MD 20892.

In Memoriam Laurence J. Peter 1919-1990

Laurence J. Peter, author of *The Peter Principle* (1969) and developer of innovative methods of teaching autistic children, died at his home near Los Angeles January 14. Peter was the author of 10 published books, although his creative masterpiece, *Principles of Teaching*, has yet to find a publisher. *The Peter Principle*, which sold eight million copies, and has been translated into more than 30 languages, rocketed Peter to instant fame as a writer, satirist and humorous lecturer. Despite the acclaim his satiric books achieved, Peter remained steadfastly an educator, devoted to the development of rational, effective teaching methods, especially for children with autism and other learning difficulties. According to Irene Peter, Laurence's widow, several university education departments are using *Principles of Teaching*, with excellent results.

Laurence J. Peter was a kind and brilliant man who made the world a better and happier place for us all.

-Bernard Rimland