Chelation Therapy as a Treatment for Autism

Abstract

As medical advances continue to be made, there has yet to be an effective and consistent cure to the commonly known condition, Autism. Some researchers and physicians state that by using chelation therapy, it could help cure or reduce the symptoms experienced in autistic individuals who are infected by vaccines or other sources. Because of the lack of research and knowledge of chelation therapy, there has been some controversy as to the ethics of providing chelation therapy to autistic children. The families that are put through these trials are often faced with high costs, and no guarantee that their child could be cured. But to some families, a little hope is better than none when thinking about the future of their child. Other families refuse to put their child through the therapy due to the effects it could have upon their child, and continue to wait for further advances in medicine.

Introduction

Ethical Question

Is using chelation therapy on autistic children unethical?

What is Autism?

As Glazer says, autism is a condition in which the individual has an impaired ability to relate to other people, repetitive behaviors, and delays in language. "Ritualistic behavior, hand flapping, overactivity (or underactivity) to pain and self-injurious behaviors like head-banging are also common" among individuals diagnosed with autism. Many of the first signs of autism begin at birth. Some of the more common symptoms include "failing to make eye contact or react with the smiles and gestures that are the foundation of human interaction." It is also not uncommon, however, for signs of autism to start to show when the child is about two years of age. Since signs start to show after a period of what seemed to be a normal development in the child, the cause of autism is blamed on the vaccinations given during this time. Brain scans illustrate that children, as well as adults, diagnosed with autism have brains that are structured and function in a different way than brains of non-autistic individuals. Recent autopsies have shown that the brains of autistic individuals are in fact larger than non-autistic individuals. Studies also show that there is a difference in cell and density packed cells in the limbic system of the brain. The limbic system is involved with "learning, memory, emotion and behavior." This is a reason as to why autistic individuals have difficulties when it comes to social interaction, but they are able to become experts on other subjects. For instance, Temple Grandin, author of Thinking in Pictures, "has built a distinguished career as an animal scientist" (Glazer).

Discussion

The Pros of Chelation Therapy

Chelation therapy research studies at Cornell University published in an issue of Environmental Health Perspectives showed that chelation therapy, in fact, can reduce behavioral and health problems. It also did not result from exposure to lead (Hogg). In the past, many physicians had also reported positive results in improving the behavior of autistic children after the children had undergone a purge or chelation process to rid them of mercury. After seeing these results, the Autism Research Institute (ARI) responded by holding a "Consensus Conference on the Detoxification of Autistic Children at Dallastone, Texas, February 9th through 11th, 2001" (ARI). The conference consisted of 25 physicians and scientists with a understanding of mercury and the detoxification of mercury. Several of the participants were parent of autistic children. These physicians had also carried out the process of detoxification of mercury on their children and had positive results. Along with the children of these seven physicians, these physicians had also used chelation therapy on over 3,000 patients. Approximately 1,500 of the 3,000 patients had been diagnosed with autism (ARI).

The Cons of Chelation Therapy

Although some studies have shown to help treat autistic behaviors, there are many risks that have been associated with chelation therapy. Chelation cures have been considered to be "dangerously misleading" (Vogel E756). Back in October of 2010, the United States Food and Drug Administration warned several companies selling over-the-counter chelation therapy treatments to stop marketing the products. This FDA said that there is no proof or guarantee that the chelation therapy being marketed by these companies would cure conditions, such as autism, different heart diseases, Parkinson's disease, or even Alzheimer's disease. Chelation therapy also comes with possible risks and side effects, such as dehydration, kidney failure and death (Vogel E756).

Furthermore, the reason why it is strongly recommended patients get tested and monitored by a doctor for the amount of heavy metals in the body is because chelation therapy can actually cause symptoms of heavy metal poisoning if there are no high levels of heavy metals in the body to begin with. Chelation therapy can actually strip the body of its needed minerals, such as calcium and iron, when there are no heavy metals present (Hogg). Anther reason some are opposed to chelation therapy is because of the "one cardinal rule of human subjects research enshrined in the Common Rule, which governs all federally funded human subjects research. Is that vulnerable populations must be protected by an additional level of ethical constraints" (Orac). Vulnerable populations can refer to prisoners, the mentally disabled, and children. Individuals who are considered to be mentally disabled are usually unable to make decisions giving consent for treatment. Children, on the other hand, are not legally able to give consent for treatment or research (Orac).

Conclusion

Although chelation therapy does have its risks, some individuals may still take their chances and continue on with the treatment. If one is planning on administering chelation therapy for his or her autistic child, it is extremely important that they take all precautions. One should go see a physician to take tests that check for the amount of heavy metals in the body before even deciding to carry out the chelation therapy. It is also recommended that the levels of vital minerals in the body are monitored during as well as after the duration of the chelation treatment (Hogg). Some may continue on to say that chelation therapy is unethical, but most likely will not stop some parents from carrying on the treatment in hopes of curing their children from autism.

Bibliography


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