Age of Autism – Daily Web Newsletter of the Autism Epidemic:

http://www.ageofautism.com/2008/09/chelation-study.html

September 17, 2008 - Chelation Study Cancelled

So who canned the NIMH chelation study as "too dangerous?" Children are given huge doses of chemotherapy and radiation in a desperate effort to save them from cancer - fully knowing the side effects themselves can be deadly. It's a fair risk most parents are willing to take to help a sick child.

If your child is full of lead, the doctor will chelate him as a standard protocol. (Children.WebMD.) *If removing the source of lead and balancing nutrition do not reduce lead levels, or if the blood lead level is very high, chelation therapy may be used. Chelation therapy is a process that rapidly reduces the amount of lead stored in the body. Drugs called chelating agents cause metals like lead to bind to them, and then they are eliminated from the body through urine. Because chelating agents increase the absorption of lead and other metals, it is essential that sources of lead exposure be removed before a person is treated.*

But if your child is full of mercury, too bad. The mainstream docs won't chelate him. After all, he might just get better and then all the people who've railed against autism treatments and screamed at us that our kids are "uncurable!" would be wrong.

Wall Street Journal: Health Blog

September 18, 2008, 11:08 am
http://blogs.wsj.com/health/2008/09/18/nih-cancels-study-of-chelation-as-autism-treatment/?mod=googlenews_wsj

NIH Cancels Study of Chelation as Autism Treatment

Posted by Jacob Goldstein

If some people are using a treatment that most doctors think doesn't work and may involve some real risks, should public health officials study the intervention to get clear answers? That's an ethically tricky question.

The National Institute of Mental Health had proposed a study (described here) of a therapy called chelation to treat children with autism. Chelation, which is used to remove metals from the body, is popular among some parents, but most doctors and public health officials say there's scant evidence its effective in treating autism.

Yesterday, NIMH said it wouldn't go forward with the study, which has been under discussion for a couple of years but never got started. An institutional review board that assessed the study found a while back that "there was no clear evidence for direct benefit to the children who would participate in the chelation trial and that the study presents more than a minimal risk," NIMH said in a statement.

A subtext here is the issue of mercury, which has been used as a preservative in some vaccines (though most pediatric vaccines no longer contain it). Some parents connect mercury, vaccines and autism, and they say chelation can remove mercury and treat autism. But the public health community roundly rejects the autism-mercury connection, citing multiple studies.

As the journal Science reported earlier this summer, an NIH trial in the 1990s of a gastrointestinal drug called secretin — popular at the time for treating autism — showed that the drug didn't help autistic children, leading to a decline in its use. The chelation trial, had it failed to show a benefit, might have had a similar effect. (Or, if it had shown a benefit, it would have led to expanded the use of the procedure.)

The chelation study would have used a drug called DMSA, a form of which is sold as succimer or Chemet. A study, published in 2006, found that the drug did improve cognitive function in rodents with lead poisoning; but the study also found that the drug caused cognitive problems in rodents that hadn't been exposed to lead.

Ultimately, NIMH wasn't confident enough in the safety of the procedure to proceed, the agency's scientific director Richard Nakamura told the Associated Press. "We recognize that for children there is a fine line for the risk-benefit ratio," he said. "You have to be pretty certain of the overall safety of the procedure."

Chelation Study For Autism Cancelled

By Jenny Thompson on 11/05/2008 http://www.healthiertalk.com/chelation-study-autism-cancelled-062

I'm never surprised when powerful corporations and their government pals subvert science and suppress the truth. That story is as old as the hills.

But I'm ALWAYS infuriated.

Puffed-up claims: In 2006, the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) was given permission to proceed with a study that would test chelation treatment in children with autism. Simple, right?

The treatment is somewhat controversial (it removes heavy metals from the body), but let's at least test it and see if this could be a breakthrough for autistic kids and their parents. But this past July we were told that the study was postponed and under review because of safety concerns.

Now keep in mind that more than 15 years ago chelation was approved by the FDA as a treatment for lead poisoning in adults and children. And keep in mind that the NIMH director supports the trial. In fact, in July, he told the Associated Press, "So many moms have said, 'It's saved my kids.'" Nevertheless, the trial has now been cancelled.

!!! Reuters news service reports that health officials deemed this FDA-approved therapy too risky. Really? Too risky for whom? Those health officials tell us it puts the kids at risk. But I believe it's WAY too risky for drug companies that manufacture vaccines. If chelation were proved to be successful in treating autism, it would refuel the debate over the link between autism and childhood vaccines. !!!

And this would happen at a time when the mainstream press is cooperating nicely, portraying any suggestion of that link as absurd. Let's look at some of the language.

Reuters: "Many studies and medical experts have dismissed the notion…"

Associated Press: "…based on the fringe theory that mercury in vaccines triggers autism - a theory never proved and rejected by mainstream science."

MedPage Today: "…the trial was predicated on a theory that mercury exposure causes autism, which is rejected by most scientists."

They're like parrots, sitting in a cage, squawking their lines, but providing zero evidence to support these empty claims.

Jenny Thompson works with the team at Health Sciences Institute to uncover important health information and expose ridiculous health *misinformation*, most notably through the HSI e-Alert. Visit http://www.hsibaltimore.com/ to sign up for the free HSI e-Alert.

Medical News: Autism **http://www.medpagetoday.com/Neurology/Autism/10979**

NIMH Cancels Autism Chelation Trial

By John Gever, Staff Writer, MedPage Today
Published: September 19, 2008
Reviewed by Zalman S. Agus, MD; Emeritus Professor, University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine.

BETHESDA, Md., Sept. 19 -- A planned trial of chelation therapy for autistic children has been called off by the National Institute of Mental Health.

"NIMH has decided that resources are better directed at this time to testing other potential therapies for autism spectrum disorders, and is not pursuing the additional review required to begin the study," said a statement.

The trial would have tested succimer (Chemet), also known as DMSA, in 120 autistic children four to 10 years old with detectable but not toxic levels of mercury or lead in their blood. No children had been recruited for the trial.

Succimer is FDA-approved for treating lead toxicity. In addition to chelating lead and mercury, succimer also scavenges other metals such as zinc, iron, and calcium.

The trial was announced in July 2006 and was aimed at testing a notion that mercury exposure, from vaccines or other sources, is responsible for autism. The theory has been rejected by most scientists on the basis of a string of studies finding little or no link between vaccine exposure and autism. (See: MMR Vaccine Not Linked to Autism)

Action Points

- Explain to interested patients that the National Institute of Mental Health has canceled plans to test mercury chelation as a therapy for autism.
- Explain that the trial was predicated on a theory that mercury exposure causes autism, which is rejected by most scientists.
- Explain that a recent animal study found that the drug to be used in the trial caused cognitive impairments in rats that did not have exposure to heavy metals.

Nevertheless, many parents of autistic children have insisted that chelation therapy has helped their children. Autism advocacy groups had pleaded for the study to confirm the treatment's effectiveness.

But an animal study reported in February 2007 in *Environmental Health Perspectives* by Barbara Strupp, Ph.D., of Cornell, and colleagues suggested that succimer may be overtly toxic in the absence of elevated levels of heavy metals.

The NIMH statement said that following the publication, an institutional review board "**reassessed the risk-benefit ratio of the proposed study. The board determined that there was no clear evidence for direct benefit to the children who would participate in the chelation trial and that the study presents more than a minimal risk."**

That determination meant that an additional approval process was required within HHS. This includes review by a pediatric advisory board, the FDA, and public commentary. The process can take as long

as a year. And even with a green light from this process, "it is estimated that data collection would take at least another three years," the NIMH said. "During those four years, it is quite likely that additional research on the basic pathology of autism will provide deeper understanding of the causes of autism and more refined avenues for developing treatments."

The NIMH statement said the agency has decided to use the funds earmarked for the chelation trial for other purposes rather than pursue the HHS review.

The study by Dr. Strupp and colleagues tested succimer in rats exposed to moderate and high doses of lead as well as unexposed control rats. **The animals exposed to lead showed marked cognitive impairments that were significantly reversed with the succimer chelation**.

In the rats not exposed to lead, however, succimer led to cognitive deficits comparable to those seen in the lead-exposed rats before chelation.

"These results raise concerns about administering succimer to children without elevated levels of heavy metals," Dr. Strupp told *MedPage Today* in an email.

"When parents of autistic children are considering whether or not to administer chelating agents to their children, they should consider not only the possibility that the drug may be ineffective, but that there is also the possibility that the drug could produce lasting adverse effects," she added.

The proposed NIMH trial would have included children with blood mercury levels of 0.1 to 44 mcg/dL or blood lead of 0.1 to 10 mcg/dL. The upper bounds are the accepted thresholds for toxicity requiring treatment.

Prior to the study by Dr. Strupp and colleagues, the most significant adverse effect expected from the therapy was that children would lose these vital nutrients.

A statement from Talk About Curing Autism, a support and advocacy group for parents of autistic children, expressed disappointment at the NIMH trial's cancellation.

"Anecdotally, **Talk About Curing Autism has either seen or heard of thousands of children that have had many of their autistic symptoms decrease due to this therapy**. By discontinuing this study, the NIMH will not prove the effectiveness of chelation therapy one way or another," the statement said.

"Instead, they have merely left parents with more unanswered questions. TACA hopes that the NIMH would reconsider the chelation study for the children that urgently need their help."

Internet forum and blog posts on autism-related sites were even harsher. Said one post at Autismweb.com, "We deserve a formal study. If they aren't going to man up and do one, **it's just going to add to the many reasons why we don't trust them. I know I had little faith that they were going to do what's right. Now, I have none."**

The Cornell rat study was funded by the National Institutes of Health. No potential conflicts of interest were reported.