

Assessing Complementary and Controversial Interventions

Tips for Parents by Phyllis Anne Teeter Ellison, Ed.D.

IN LIGHT OF growing public interest in non-medication interventions for the treatment of AD/HD, CHADD's Professional Advisory Board (PAB) has updated CHADD's fact sheet on *Assessing Complementary and Controversial Interventions*. The revised fact sheet contains valuable information for understanding and evaluating complementary and controversial interventions in order to make informed decisions. This article summarizes some of the tips for parents that can be found in the fact sheet.

What to Ask Alternative Health Care Providers

- Have clinical trials been completed on this intervention? Do you have information summarizing these results? Clinical trials typically refer to controlled studies where an intervention is carefully evaluated under research conditions. Generally, clinical trials include the following characteristics: studies are repeated a number of times; participants are carefully screened before entering the study; participants are randomly assigned to a treatment; placebos or other interventions are included as a comparison to the new treatment; participants and researchers are not told which treatment is administered; and scientists have confidence in their findings. ***Providers should be prepared to answer these questions.*** As a parent, you may want to avoid these interventions if providers are unwilling or unable to answer these questions. Healthy skepticism is appropriate.
- Is public information about your alternative approach available from the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH)? You can contact NCCAM directly at (888) 644-6226 or visit its website at: www.nccam.nih.gov. NCCAM provides information about complementary and alternative medicines free of charge.
- Is there a national professional organization of

practitioners? Do states require professional licensing and training requirements for practitioners who provide this treatment?

- Is this treatment reimbursed by health insurance? What out-of-pocket financial obligations will my family have? How long will this out-of-pocket financial obligation last?

What to Ask Yourself

The following questions may help you spot unproven treatments or therapies that promise more than they deliver.

- Is the treatment likely to work for you or your child? Does it claim to be a remedy for everyone with AD/HD and other health problems? Are case studies the only evidence presented for its efficacy? Is there only one study supporting its use? Do studies include a control group (i.e., a group that received no treatment)?
- How safe is the remedy? Does it include directions for proper use? Does it list the contents? Does it provide warnings of side effects? Most importantly, is it described as harmless or natural?
- How is the remedy promoted? Does it claim to have a secret formula? Does it claim to work immediately and permanently for everyone with AD/HD? Is it described as "astonishing," "miraculous" or an "amazing breakthrough?" Does it claim to cure AD/HD? Is it provided through only one source? Is it promoted through infomercials, self-promoting books or by mail order? Does it claim that it is being suppressed or unfairly attacked by the medical community? If so, remember the old adage, "Buyer Beware!"
- How is it represented in the media? Does the researcher own the company marketing the treatment under study? What is the source of the information? Good sources include: universities, medical schools, government agencies (NIH and the National Institute

Our revised fact sheet will help you understand and evaluate complementary and controversial interventions in order to make informed decisions.

of Mental Health), professional medical associations and national disorder/disease specific organizations (like CHADD). Professional affiliations and relevant credentials of “experts” should be provided. Reputable medical journals require that authors reveal possible conflicts of interest.

Tips for Negotiating the World Wide Web

Although the Internet is becoming a frequently used resource for medical information, it is also a low cost and global marketing place that is, at times, home to unreliable health information. Be sure to:

- Know where you are getting information from. Part of the web address will tell you about the source (e.g., .edu = university, .com = company, .org = non-profit organization, .gov = government agency).
- Obtain a second opinion regarding the information presented on the Web. Use part of a phrase or name and run it through a search engine to find other discussions on the topic. Finally, talk to your health care provider.

Don't forget to use the CHADD website at www.chadd.org. One of its major purposes is to provide information on evidenced-based treatments for AD/HD. The National Resource Center (NRC) on AD/HD is a CHADD program funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The CHADD website provides a link to the NRC where you can access information on topics such as About AD/HD, Diagnosing and Treating AD/HD, Dealing with Systems, Educational Issues and Living with AD/HD. The NRC also has information in Spanish.

The latest revision of the complementary and controversial interventions fact sheet provides information on alternative, complemen-

tary and controversial treatments for AD/HD including dietary interventions (e.g., food eliminations), nutritional supplements, interactive metronome training, sensory integration therapy, anti-motion sickness medication, candida yeast, EEG biofeedback (see the article on page 30 in this issue of *Attention!*[®]), chiropractic services, including applied kinesiology (realignment of bones in the skull), optometric vision training, thyroid treatment and lead treatment.

Finally, it is important that families consult with their physicians before using these interventions. A good medical history and physical examination are important to identify thyroid dysfunction, allergies, food intolerances, dietary imbalances or deficiencies, and other medical conditions that may mimic symptoms of AD/HD or affect or interact with treatments.

“Each child and each individual is unique. While multimodal treatment is the gold standard of treatment for AD/HD, not all individuals can tolerate medications, and medications are not always effective. Some individuals experience side effects that are too great. Being an informed consumer about the published science behind an intervention and frequently communicating with your medical doctor are important factors in determining if the interventions identified in this paper should be considered.”¹

Our thanks are extended to the CHADD Professional Advisory Board for their expertise and hard work on crafting these tips. You can access the revised fact sheet at the CHADD website at www.chadd.org. ■

Phyllis Anne Teeter Ellison, Ed.D., is the chair of the *Attention!* editorial advisory board.

Reference

- ¹ CHADD Fact Sheet No. 6. October 2003.