Gastrointestinal Disorders and School Lunches

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This issue of Pediatric Annals was primarily organized by Miguel Saps, MD, of Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children’s Hospital of Chicago and Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. Dr. Saps is very highly regarded nationally for his expertise related to pediatric gastrointestinal disorders, including those that may have functional or psychosomatic aspects. Really terrific reviews on the evaluation and management of adolescents with malnutrition; children with irritable bowel syndrome, chronic idiopathic nausea, or biliary dyskinesia; and infants with excessive crying are included here. These articles are full of pediatric pearls that will be helpful to practitioners who so frequently in their offices deal with children with chronic abdominal complaints.

SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAMS

Somewhat related to the gastrointestinal tract and nutrition is the topic of subsidized school lunches, which has been in the news recently. Wisconsin Representative Paul Ryan, who is Chair of the House Budget Committee and was Mitt Romney’s Vice Presidential candidate, took a strong stand against school lunches in a March 6, 2014, speech to the Conservative Political Action Conference. He referred to “offering a full stomach and an empty soul,” stating that mothers who pack their children’s lunches show their love, whereas those receiving free lunch at school feel that nobody cares. Apparently Rep. Ryan doesn’t believe that there are children who are hungry in the U.S. who benefit greatly from school lunch programs.

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Alas, Glenn Kessler of the Washington Post found that Ms. Anderson told this story during her testimony before Rep. Ryan’s House Budget Committee last summer. Mr. Kessler contacted her office to learn more about her meeting with the boy. Her office staff indicated that Ms. Anderson misspoke and had actually intended to say that she “once heard someone say…” She was referring to a television interview she had seen with Maurice Mazyck (now in his late 30s) who repeated a story about himself told in a book, An Invisible Thread, by Laura Schroff. Ms. Schroff, and Mr. Mazyck (25 or more years later) now partner with the group No Kid Hungry to help end child hunger in the U.S., in part by connecting hungry kids with

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An avid stamp collector, Dr. Shulman chooses relevant stamps from his personal collection to accompany his column each month.

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Thus, Rep. Ryan used a story to argue forcefully against subsidizing school lunch programs that actually involved a man when he was a young boy and who now is a very strong advocate for subsidized school lunch programs and food stamps. The hard facts in America today include that 22% of children live in poverty, that the percentage of poor families with children not receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families rose from 36% in 1997 to 74% in 2012, and that 14.5% (17.6 million) of U.S. households had difficulty at some time in 2012 providing enough food for all their members due to a lack of resources. A January 2014 poll by Pew Research Center and USA Today found that 65% of Americans believed the gap between the rich and others has increased in the last 10 years.2

THIS MONTH’S STAMPS

Illustrating this column are a strip of five charming stamps issued by Singapore in June of 2013 that show five common greetings in sign language (“Hi,” “Welcome,” “I love you,” “Thanks,” and “Goodbye”). These very colorful stamps were issued to increase public awareness of sign language and to help the public learn some basic signs. The designer is Singapore Association for the Deaf member, Kenny Tiang. There are many sign languages worldwide, including American sign language (ASL), but many are closely related; for example, ASL, Mexican sign language and Quebec sign language are all derived from Old French sign language, which predates the 18th Century. Additionally, British, Australian, and New Zealand sign languages are very similar.

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Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E) wrote that the deaf could not learn except through a spoken language, and this prejudice persisted for 2,000 years until it was disputed during the Renaissance. The Italian physician and mathematician, Gerolamo Cardano (1501-1576), in the 16th Century was probably the first to show that learning did not require hearing. The first method created to teach the deaf to use hand gestures to communicate is attributed to the 17th Century Spanish priest, soldier, and language scholar, Juan Pablo Bonet (1573-1633), whose 1620 book apparently was not published until 1885. The Parisian priest, Abbé Charles-Michel de l’Épée (1712-1789), used Bonet’s language of signs to create a finger alphabet for spelling words around 1750, which has changed little since. Abbé de l’Épée established the first social and religious association for the deaf, and in 1771, the first free public school for the deaf.

A brisk controversy developed between those favoring sign language and those supporting “oralism” to train teachers of the deaf to use oral education (including lip reading). Alexander Graham Bell (1847-1922) established an institute in Boston in 1872, and in 1890, the Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf to support oralism. This controversy has been reignited with the development of cochlear implants.

REFERENCES