No excuse! ADDitude misleads readers
The June issue of ADDitude, a magazine dedicated to ADD and ADHD, was promoted as a special wellness issue. The cover boasted “the truth” about alternative treatments. The gist of a 3-page article by Jamie Talan was that alternative treatments sometimes seem to work, but this is simply a placebo effect. Talan refers to a case of a dedicated mother who adjusted her son’s diet and used special allergy treatments and other natural approaches. The boy responded dramatically; violent behavior ceased and he began doing well in school. It is pointed out that [conventional] doctors “have no clue” what helped the boy, and the placebo effect is suggested. Talan further distorts and misinforms readers on several approaches, including some that have been proven beneficial for ADD/ADHD.

Here are some examples and ACN’s comment:

On Nutritional therapy:
❖ “There is absolutely no evidence that ADHD is triggered by nutritional or dietary imbalances.” Absolutely not true.
❖ The article refers to a publication by the Feingold Association on the relationship between hyperactivity and chemical additives as a “cult classic.” Double-blind studies support this association.

On Allergies:
❖ “Many parents have their children tested for allergies under the mistaken assumption that food and chemical allergies trigger behavior problems.” Double-blind studies show that allergies can trigger behavior problems.

On Biofeedback:
❖ Admitting that many patients and parents swear by the results and that there has been promising research for biofeedback, Talan emphasizes that “studies are too small and not well designed, it can be costly, and it is unclear whom it may benefit or why.” The author puts as negative a spin as possible on this and all non-drug approaches. Of course, conventional practitioners do not know who will benefit from specific drugs, which can also be costly over many years and have the potential to do harm.

“Belief is a powerful ally, so it’s not surprising parents would think that a lot of these things work,” a doctor is quoted as saying. There is even reference to the “underworld of alternative medicine.”

One has to question the motive in providing such a negatively biased, erroneous, and harmful account. The author is described as a frequent contributor to ADDitude and a science reporter for Newsday in New York. Copies of this article will be sent to both publications.

The effects of supplementation with highly unsaturated fatty acids on ADHD in children with specific learning difficulties

The authors tested the prediction that relative deficiencies in highly unsaturated fatty acids may underlie some of the behavioral and learning problems associated with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). They studied the effects of supplementation with these fatty acids on children with specific learning difficulties (mainly dyslexia) who also had ADHD. Forty-one children aged 8-12 years were randomly given supplementation with highly unsaturated fatty acids or placebo for 12 weeks.

The groups did not differ at baseline, but after 12 weeks, cognitive problems and general behavior problems were significantly reduced for the group treated with the supplements. Supplementation with highly unsaturated fatty acids appears to reduce ADHD-related symptoms in children with specific learning difficulties.


Rapid increase in ADHD rate among girls

“The rapidly increasing rate of ADHD among girls, and the prolonged nature of the disorder, represent significant public health problems.”

Data was analyzed from a national survey to determine the number of girls aged 5 to 18 who were being diagnosed with ADHD, and what the trends were in prescribing stimulant medication, including Ritalin, for them.

Information from 1990 to the end of 1998 in the United States suggested that the number of office-based visits documenting a diagnosis of ADHD tripled for girls during this period, and the number for boys increased slightly over two fold. Prescription drug treatment for girls also increased by almost three times. The authors conclude that the “rapidly increasing rate of ADHD among girls, and the prolonged nature of the disorder, represent significant public health problems.”

Robison LM, Skaer TL, Sclar DA, Galin RS.Is Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder Increasing Among Girls in the US?: Trends in Diagnosis and the Prescribing of Stimulants, CNS Drugs 2002;16(2):129-137.