Please Don’t Take Away My Autistic Son’s Treatment

By Paul E. Peterson

T
ough they have never met, my son David and I have no information about his specific diagnosis in this age of technology and the use of electronic stimulus devices. The FDA’s proposal ignores that decision.

The FDA might ban the harmful skin shocks that keep him from self-injury, though they have worked.

The FDA claims that alternative treatments are available. It is wrong. Only highly educated professionals can properly diagnose and treat autism. The harmful, two-second shock used by the FDA is a cruel and inhumane treatment that only serves to increase the harm to the child. It has no therapeutic value.

Denying treatment to people with disabilities when it is available to others violates the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment. In its 1997 ruling in Judge Rotenberg Educational Center Inc. v. Commissioner of the Department of Mental Retardation, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court unanimously affirmed a lower-court finding of contempt against the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for failing to provide appropriate treatment for a child with autism.

The FDA asserts that skin shocks are no longer necessary but it provides no documentation that drugs are effective for people like my son. In the past, drug therapy aggravated David’s self-injurious behavior. The use of psychotropic drugs also poses multiple risks of physical and psychological side effects. By contrast, skin shocks have no demonstrated side effects beyond a temporary redness to the skin that usually disappears within minutes.

The FDA also asserts that the skin shock constitutes physical and psychological harm. However, the shock has been thoroughly studied and found to be effective in reducing self-injurious behavior. The FDA’s proposal would place his health—and life—at risk.

The alternative treatment plan for him is physical restraints and mind-numbing drugs. For the sake of our son’s well-being and safety, we have benefited from an electronic stimulus device, the FDA must withdraw its proposed regulation.

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After Fleeing the Nazis, a Legacy That Won’t Run Dry

By Seth M. Siegel

H
ow does one overcome almost unimaginable horror and trauma? For Holocaust survivors Howard and Lottie Marcus, the healing came, in part, from the hope that they could help to provide refuge for other Jews who might find themselves at risk. But after restarting their broken lives in America, this modest couple could never have imagined that they would end up giving what is likely the largest single charitable gift in Israel's history—$400 million—to be announced June 24.

Howard and Lottie were born in pre-Holocaust Germany—he in 1908, she in 1916. But, they lived in America. With the rise of Nazism, both had the 17-year-old Lottie persuaded her parents to allow her to go to the U.S. Lottie's husband was by all accounts, a gifted dentist. After the election of Hitler in 1933, Howard made his way to Naples and a professional life there, only to find himself in jeopardy again in 1936, when Mussolini and Hitler demanded that Italy expel all foreign Jews. As luck would have it, one of Howard's patients was the U.S. consul general and, in an act of kindness, said that he was willing to guarantee that they could remain in Naples. He pursued her until she agreed to marry him. It was a small and bitter-sweet wedding. Other than the bride and groom and one of his three sisters, every member of the two families had perished in the Holocaust.

The Marceus lived quietly and frugally. Their small inducements included an occasional ski vacation with Ben Graham and his girlfriend (and future wife). One day, they asked their friend for investment advice with annual compounding, that investment grew to millions and then to billions. The couple continued to live modestly. No one knew they had any idea of the magnitude of their wealth.

The frugal couple bumped into young Warren Buffett. Now they've left millions to Israeli water research.

In the late 1970s, they followed the advice of Howard's doctor and moved to New York to the warmer clime of San Diego. In retirement they pursued their interest in world affairs, desert farming, among other areas. A few years later they made a generous donation to support the Zuckerm Institute for Water Research. But they still needed to find a home for the rest of their large, and growing, fortune.

In 2005 Howard and Lottie, now 95 and 86, made the long flight—together from California to Israel. They returned with clarity on what to do with their estate.

Howard and Lottie loved America and often expressed gratitude for having been saved from certain death by the benevolence of their adoptive homeland. Yet they also often told friends that if Germany—‘the most civilized nation in the world’—in their words—could descend into barbarity and the mass murder of human beings, how much more could any nation endure?