



UPI ASKS, "IS THERE AN EPIDEMIC?"

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The Age of Autism: What Epidemic?

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Washington, DC, August 1, 2005 (UPI) -- One of the core questions about [autism](#) is whether it actually has increased at startling rates or if it is just better recognized than it used to be.

Officials at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta say they do not know the answer to that question but are trying to find out. Some medical experts say they think there really has been no upsurge in cases, just more public awareness and broader diagnostic criteria.

Don't tell that to many parents of autistic children -- parents such as Kendra Pettengill of Roseburg, Ore. She got in touch with UPI's Age of Autism to explain why she finds that argument not only ridiculous, but downright revolting. Because of the clarity and power of her comments, we decided to run them at length.

In future columns we will print observations by those who think there is no autism upsurge. If you agree, please get in touch.

Here are excerpts from Kendra Pettengill's comments:

If I hear one more reporter repeating the mantra that part of the autism increase is better diagnostics, I will simply go mad. Anyone who has seen even one child with autism knows that not one of these [kids](#) would ever go undiagnosed.

We would have to believe that 10 or 20 years ago a parent would not have demanded to know why their child had regressed after being normal. Would not have demanded to know why they suddenly couldn't relate to the outside world. Would not have demanded to know why they persistently rocked, flapped their hands, walked on their toes, bit themselves, pulled out their own hair and banged their heads to the point of serious damage. Would not have asked why their child had hundreds of meltdowns every day and could not stand a change in routine.

Would not have questioned why their child would not make eye [contact](#), or screamed if they were touched or held. Would not have questioned why certain textures, foods, sounds, colors sent their children into a wild tailspin for no apparent reason. Would not have questioned why their child only ate three foods, but would chew on wood, sand, or fabrics. Would not question why their child could not speak at 2 years old, or why he could speak and then suddenly stopped abruptly never to speak again.

Parents, it would have to be believed, would not have questioned the litany of medical issues that their child with autism also faces. You would have to believe that schools and teachers also somehow missed all of this and these children managed school and just slipped through the cracks. To believe this you have never seen even a mildly autistic child.

No child with autism ever went undiagnosed.

I have been dealing with this for four years and I am still appalled that this has not been declared a national emergency. What if you announced tonight that 1 in every 150 children were being abducted from their beds every night? Parents would be screaming for the government, the police, somebody to do something. Well that is what is happening, except they are only taking our children's [brains](#) and leaving the [body](#) behind.

Many scientists, doctors, teachers and parents know that the increase is real and it is most likely due to an environmental assault such as vaccines. Denial using the "changed diagnostics" line serves no one. It leaves parents like me on the fringe of society, dealing with a devastating disease with no assistance. It abandons a generation of children that could be helped in many ways to become contributing members of society.

I beg anyone who believes it is better diagnostics to find all the 20-, 30-, 40-something people who have autism and were somehow missed in the process of life. They must be out there somewhere -- they went through 12 years of school, possibly college; married; got jobs, and were somehow missed as autistic.

Here is a hint. If they did all those things without being noticed by anyone, they are not autistic. This epidemic now is made up of kids who cannot do any of those things. They have no friends. For the most part they cannot even function in a typical classroom, let alone be missed in one. They can't comprehend classroom directions; hence even in a typical classroom they need an aide to ensure they gather the proper information and make it through their day.

Every teacher or school person I speak to says with utter fear in their eyes, "Something is very wrong with our children." We are being inundated with autism, ADD, ADHD, speech delays, tics, Tourette's syndrome, asthma, insulin-dependent diabetes.

I look back on my entire life, and I cannot come up with one single person I knew in grade school, junior high, high school, college, the Air Force or workplaces who exhibited what even I would easily recognize as even mild symptoms of autism, let alone a full-blown case.

There was a blind guy in my school who also rocked a lot, but so does Stevie Wonder. He also had no other symptoms of autism and even wrestled on the varsity team. You would think if it has always been this prevalent that I could recall at least one, if not many, people who would be questionable.

No, none. But then again, I didn't know anyone with asthma growing up, no children with ADD, ADHD, no kids or classmates with bipolar disorder or Tourette's either. Come to think of it, I never knew anyone on anti-psychotic medications, nor do I remember prescription cubbies in the classrooms like they have now to monitor and dispense all the inhalers, Ritalin, Risperdal and the like.

The teachers and educators and parents are right. What is wrong with our children that 1 in 6 has a developmental disorder, including speech delays, tics and autism on the severe end of that?

Those claiming better diagnosis instead of a real autism epidemic need to get out of their research clinics, get their noses out of their papers full of numbers that apply to no one in America, get out of their ivory towers, get out of their government offices and look in every small clinic, classroom and parent support group across America.

They will instantly know that not only is there an epidemic, it is actually 100 times worse than the worst-case scenario they could dream up in their worst nightmare. The denial of the numbers does not make them go away and cannot reduce them.

No child with autism has ever gone undiagnosed in any setting, in any decade, in any loving home, caring community or concerned school or classroom. Only in their unrealistic dream worlds can these "experts" continue to deny the millions of afflicted that continue to grow at record pace.

It is time this is stopped. Autism is an epidemic and a national crisis.

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