

## ADVANTAGES AND PERILS OF CLINICAL TRIALS

# Invasive therapy for children with autism is not justified

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Dear Editors,

I am writing about the paper “Outcomes of bone marrow mononuclear cell transplantation combined with interventional education for autism spectrum disorder” by Thanh et al,<sup>1</sup> first published September 9, 2020 in *STEM CELLS Translational Medicine*.

As a pediatrician who cares for autistic children, I have grave concerns about this paper. This paper does not describe valid research but rather details the abuse of disabled children. For one, the authors did not inject stem cells—they injected mononuclear bone marrow cells. They did not report on how many stem cells are in their preparation. Furthermore, injecting anything intrathecally can have serious consequences, including the development of lifelong pain (arachnoiditis) or bleeding into the spinal cord causing paralysis. Such a risky intervention should only be considered if the alternative of no treatment is more dire. Autism is not a dire sentence. There are alternative effective therapies for autism. Subjecting children, without their consent, to a seriously risky procedure is abuse. Forty-eight percent of the children have side effects, including pain. I do not consider pain a minor adverse event; I consider it major and related to the study. Furthermore, these are disabled children and are a protected vulnerable group in whom research should only be performed if it is of likely/potential benefit and poses minimal risk. In the United States, I doubt this study would be approved by an internal review board.

In addition, the authors' claims based on their results are dubious. Reassessment was done 18 months later and after a mean behavioral intervention time of 3.5 years. Perhaps the children just improved as

they matured and because of the behavioral interventions. There is no proof the dangerous injection was the cause of the improvement. There was no control of behavioral intervention without spinal injection. There was no blinding to the study. There was no control group.

I urge you to retract this paper immediately. It does damage to the autism community in general. It is biased and ableist and continues the tradition of unaccepting parents abusing their children with treatments such as bleach ingestion, spine injections, and chelation. None of these treatments work and they cause harm. This is abuse of disabled children. These children need to be accepted and helped—not abused and subjected to harmful experiments.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author indicated no potential conflicts of interest.

### REFERENCE

1. Thanh LN, Nguyen HP, Ngo MD, et al. Outcomes of bone marrow mononuclear cell transplantation combined with interventional education for autism spectrum disorder. *STEM CELLS TRANSLATIONAL MEDICINE*. 2021;10:14-26.

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