

**From Dr. Wakefield**

We recently had the pleasure of entertaining Dr. Federico Balzola from Italy who, together with Thoughtful House, is planning an international meeting in Turin, Italy for February 2009. The meeting of various experts is to develop guidelines for the management of bowel disease in children with developmental disorders (autistic enterocolitis).

Dr. Balzola worked on Crohn's disease in my lab in England in the late 1990s. He is one of the few gastroenterologists committed to seeing and helping autistic children. He was the first in the world to report "Pill Cam" investigations in affected children. Dr Balzola gave us a brief review of his work in progress.

He has seen 388 patients with autism in his clinic, 343 (89%) of whom have significant gastrointestinal symptoms. His population has a mean age of 10 yrs (range 3-37), with 277 male (80%) and 66 female. So far, 81 patients have undergone lower and upper endoscopy.

A chronic inflammatory bowel disease, consistent with our own findings, has been present in 80 of 89 patients--a very high diagnostic yield. Only one patient was completely normal.

When he divided the patients by age band there was very clear evidence that the nature of the bowel disease changes over time. Younger children had findings more typical of autistic enterocolitis, with lymphoid nodular hyperplasia in the majority. This finding was not present in the older age group, but ulcers of the bowel lining became much more common with increasing age. This finding raises the sus-



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picion that the disease may progress to Crohn's disease in some patients--a finding that requires further study.

Dr. Balzola is conducting the first follow-up study of GI treatment (GF/CF diet and anti-inflammatory/immunomodulatory therapy) that looks at both bowel and behavioral outcomes. The early data are very promising, showing measurable improvements in both areas.

Finally, Dr. Balzola has taken a very brave and important initiative: the 'guidelines' that come out of next year's meeting will be published in a medical journal so that more pediatric gastroenterologists can start to get on board, and provide much-needed help for affected children and their families.

**Diet Tips**

No one understands the challenge that prescribed dietary intervention presents to families more than the staff at Thoughtful House--most of us are adhering to it right along with our patients. However, we also know the value of following these recommendations carefully and completely.

A concern that parents often raise is the cost of food, so in an effort to assist families in think-

ing creatively, our Registered Dietitian, Deirdre Earls, offers a few tips to help keep food costs down:

- Shop at a discount store like Costco for organic items like vegetables, ground beef, eggs, and chicken, at wholesale prices.

- For the most nutritious and affordable vegetables, start a garden. You don't need land to get started. Flowerpots and other containers can support many vegetables.

- Use your blender to make homemade smoothies (which can be frozen into popsicles) and non-dairy desserts. Smoothies and frozen desserts provide a means of stirring in supplemental fruit and vegetable powders, especially during the hot months of the year.

- Homemade popsicles can be made with mineral water and low-glycemic fruit juices like pomegranate juice. (The dark color of this juice makes it easy to hide supplemental fruit and vegetable powders.)

- If your child loves chips (and what kid doesn't?), encourage them to add more nutrition to that snack by dipping it in a protein-rich dip like hummus or nut butter. In addition to providing quality protein and anti-inflammatory fats, hummus and nut/seed butters provide another means for stirring in more variety and nutrient density with the fruit and vegetable powders.

- Hummus and nut/seed butters can be made at home in a food processor, and also offer options for more variety via different beans and legumes, different combinations of nuts or seeds, and different combinations of quality fats like olive oil and coconut oil.