

Don't sue Mom

Re: Editor's Letter (May/June 2008, p. 7). We asked readers to respond to an informal survey question: "Do you think a child should be able to sue his or her birth mother for disability or damage suffered by the child because of the mother's harmful behaviour during pregnancy — such as alcohol or drug abuse, poor nutrition or reckless driving leading to fetal injury?" Here are two responses.

No. We are already a nation gone nuts over the attitude of sue or be sued. Accidents happen. Get over it!

*Evelyn Macdonald
Toronto*

No. The fetus of such a negligent mother should be euthanized, and the mother and father should both be sterilized. If parents go consequence-free when they fail to inform themselves of the impact on the fetus of eating poorly and consuming dangerous amounts of alcohol and other harmful substances, they should not be allowed to conceive children in our society.

When society is smart enough to adopt responsible attitudes itself, there will no longer be any question of eventual lawsuits against parents.

*Christian Larocque
Cytologist, Quebec City*

Medical geneticists

Re: "Genetics 101" (March/April 2008, p. 34). We were disappointed that this article did not refer to the Canadian College of Medical Geneticists (CCMG) as a resource for your readers.

The CCMG is the professional organization of clinical and laboratory geneticists that is responsible for setting standards of training and practice in genetic medicine.

The CCMG has more than 240 members, many of whom have contributed to a number of gene discoveries that have resulted in improved diagnostic capability and genetic care for Canadians.

Interested readers who wish to contact the CCMG, should go to www.ccmg-ccgm.org. While much of the information is geared primarily to those practising, training or wishing to train in medical genetics, the website is continually updated, and we are currently in the process of providing more information to assist the general public.

*Albert Chudley, MD
President, CCMG, Ottawa*

The mentally ill child

Re: "Out of the Shadows" (May/June 2008, p. 16). I found Sheldon Gordon's article on mental illness informative and well written. I have a 12-year-old son with bipolar disorder, who is currently on the road to recovery through medication. I agree that there is a lot of stigma attached to the diagnosis of mental illness, and I have also encountered a lot of prejudice against medicating my child. Yet I have no doubt that without medication, my son would have ended his life by now. He was on a path to self-destruction that was spinning dangerously out of control.

Today, the Canadian government does not recognize mental illness as a disability in children. There are no therapeutic classrooms and no help for the children, their parents or their teachers. There are no treatment beds in hospitals, and there is little to no funding available for the parents of affected children. There is very little in the way of support groups for families dealing with mental illness in children. Parents whose children have developmental or physical disabilities are eligible for funding, special classes and doctor support, but if a child has a mental illness, parents must fight for any help.

The government needs to realize that this is a very serious situation. Children are the foundation of our future generations. If, as the article states, "an estimated 14% of children in Canada have mental disorders that impair their functioning," then authorities must realize that one day those children will be adults with impaired functioning.

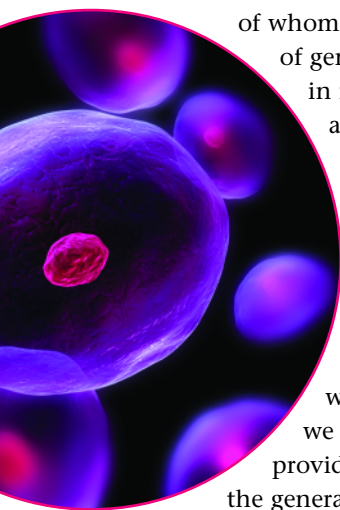
Part of the problem, it seems to me, is that many healthcare providers refuse to acknowledge that children can have mental illnesses. They don't want to put labels on kids. Some would prefer that these children be put in care, blaming their families for being unable to cope.

I don't know how many times I get the "unbelief" look from doctors and nurses when I say my child is bipolar. It is not a matter of misdiagnosis so much as a refusal to believe in the diagnosis.

There has been a lot of negative press about the overmedicated children and about the increasing rates of psychiatric diagnoses in children. But diagnoses in children are on the rise because these formerly unrecognized conditions finally began to be acknowledged in the 1990s — not because the drug companies are pressuring doctors to medicate children.

*Lorie Compton
Orillia, Ont.*

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