

Myasthenia Gravis

I was upset that you published a letter in the Jan./Feb. 2009 issue about a person with myasthenia gravis (MG) who chose to disregard his neurologist's recommendation to have a thymectomy. I would hate to see another person use this as an excuse to disregard a doctor's advice. I accept as fact what the patient's wife described as the current condition of her husband, and I wish them well. But what her husband did is dangerous, and a year and a half is too short a time to claim victory over a lifelong condition.

—John L. Jaquet
Lake Worth, FL

THE EDITOR RESPONDS: Your point is well taken, John. However, the letter you're referring to was in response to an article in the Nov./Dec. 2008 issue called "Trials and Tribulations." The article discusses the fact that experts are not sure if thymectomy actually improves MG symptoms. In fact, the first controlled study of thymectomy for MG is currently underway.

Autism

I am an autistic adult and enjoy reading your magazine. However, I was disappointed to see only **Autism Speaks** and **Autism Society of America** listed in Resource Central. Despite the name, Autism Speaks is not run for or by autistic people, and the Autism Society of America primarily helps parents and families. It would be fair to include a resource like The **Global and Regional Asperger Syndrome Partnership** (GRASP) that is run by and for autistics (grasp.org). The site includes hotly debated issues surrounding autism and its treatment. For example, Autism Speaks and the Autism Society of



America both would like a cure for Autism and GRASP would not.

—Brandy Wilson
Virginia Beach, VA

Multiple System Atrophy

I have been reading *Neurology Now* for several years as a result of my wife being diagnosed with Parkinson's disease (PD) almost nine years ago. Because of her young age (41 at the time) it was a lengthy process to get a diagnosis. As the PD progressed, it became difficult to differentiate which symptoms—like light-headedness, incontinence, and loss of balance—were caused by medications and which by other factors. In my wife's case, she was recommended for deep brain stimulation, which she had, but with no positive results. Roughly one and a half years later she was diagnosed with "probable" multiple system atrophy (confirmation can only be via autopsy of the brain), which doesn't respond to deep brain stimulation. It is very common for MSA patients to be initially diagnosed with PD, as the early symptoms are similar. I wonder how many patients never get the correct diagnosis, especially elderly ones who might also have a number of complicating age-related issues. There are no celebrities or prominent figures that I know of that campaign for MSA awareness. As such, a

story in *Neurology Now* would be interesting and educational to the lay person and medical community alike in understanding these different diseases.

—Dave Wilson
Cypress, TX

THE EDITOR RESPONDS: Thank you for the suggestion, Dave. Look for an article on MSA in an upcoming issue.

Greetings from Iraq

For over three years I have been sponsoring troop battalions in Iraq and Kuwait. This means that during the past three-plus years, I have personally sent more than 4,000 "Care" packages to U.S. troops. I purchased over \$50,000 of items they needed (selling things I no longer needed, getting support from my husband, and taking some money out of my retirement from teaching), and I have sent copies of *Neurology Now* to the battalions in both countries. These infantry units have very dangerous jobs. The magazines are a good way to keep them informed and help them relax when they have a brief moment to themselves.

This photo is of the 100th Battalion, 442nd Infantry, "Go For Broke" unit. There are 117 men in it. During World War II, it was made up of many Nisei Japanese Americans who were actually coming from internment camps in the U.S. These men showed they were proud



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PERSONAL ESSAYS: The SPEAK UP essay is a forum for people who live with neurological conditions and those who care for them. Submissions should be kept to 600 words and sent to the addresses above.

ASK THE EXPERTS: If you have a question for a doctor to answer in our ASK THE EXPERTS department, send it to the addresses above.

Americans, even during that sad phase of our history when they were interned.

—Maxine Russel
Calabasas, CA

THE EDITOR RESPONDS: Thank you, Maxine. Your spirit of giving is an inspiration. Many U.S. soldiers in Iraq have sustained traumatic brain injuries while serving—see the article “Saving Sergeant Radke” in the Sept./Oct. 2006 issue of *Neurology Now*, and “On the Front Lines” in Mar./Apr. 2008.

Stem Cell Research

As a person afflicted with an extremely rare autoimmune neurological disorder, and the son of a parent suffering with Alzheimer's, I usually look forward to reading each issue of *Neurology Now*. However, I was disappointed with the one-sided nature of the article “The State of Stem Cell Research” (Jan./Feb. 2009), especially the opening four paragraphs.

I've done much reading on this issue and felt the article treated the subject as if there were no ethical component to it at all. Putting forth facts concerning science

is fine, but making misleading statements about political decisions involving ethics—decisions supported by many voters in this republic, and indeed by many in the medical profession—is inappropriate for your publication. I would ask that the editors at least present both sides of such a complex issue.

As an example of more balanced reporting on stem cell research, go to ibdeditorials.com and search for “Stemming the Tide of AIDS.”

—Paul Ashley
Wheaton, IL

THE EDITOR RESPONDS: Thank you for your letter, Paul. We did not mean to imply that research using embryonic stem cells has no ethical dimension, or to take a particular ethical position. In fact, most of the article was devoted to the progress made using non-embryonic stem cells. However, given the limits of space in the magazine and the complexity of the ethical debate around stem cells, we chose to report only on the research itself. We would urge readers to investigate the matter for themselves, from a variety of perspectives.

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