

Hidden Head Injury

At age eight, my normally obedient, sunshiney child—the peacekeeper of the family—suddenly began flying into fits of rage followed by vacant staring and pacing. I called our pediatrician, who sent us to a child psychiatrist. Later, my son would begin hearing and seeing "ghosts." He was misdiagnosed with a psychotic disorder, placed on antipsychotic drugs, and spent the next 10 years of his precious childhood in and out of mental hospitals.

What we did not know was that exactly three days before the sudden onset of his bizarre symptoms, while in the care of his older siblings, he had sustained a violent blow to the front of his skull, after which he landed on the back of his head several feet away on a concrete floor. He was unconscious for about an hour, blood and fluids leaking from his nose, mouth, and one ear. This was hidden from me because his brothers were afraid of getting into trouble. He has since been properly diagnosed with a frontal lobe brain injury and is slowly improving, but he will never be the same

Since sharing my son's story, I have heard from many families with similar experiences. Their children have been diagnosed with everything from autism to ADHD to bipolar disorder, all after an unreported head injury. In some cases, an abusive parent had repeatedly bashed their child's head against the wall; the abusive parent was still in the home but the other parent was afraid to report the injury.

What will it take to get health professionals to probe for hidden head injury in patients who suddenly develop abnormal behaviors?

—Andrea Duarte-Rambo Overland Park, KS

THE EDITOR RESPONDS:

We hope your story will compel readers to report

head injuries to their doctors. Please look for articles on concussion in the coming year—the American Academy of Neurology has released a statement about concussion in sports. You can read about it on the "Breaking News" section of neurologynow.com or at bit.ly/AANConcussion.

Cruetzfeldt-Jakob Disease

My father was just diagnosed with Cruetzfeldt-Jakob disease, a degenerative and fatal brain disorder that causes dementia. The disease afflicts approximately one person per million worldwide.

Dad was and still is a brilliant man, an accomplished architect with an incredible vocabulary. He has been my mentor and role model. Even through the disease I can still feel his adoration for his family—there is no mistaking that look. He adores his three girls, respects his sons-in-law, and loves his grandchildren.

I inherited the movement disorder gene—I have Parkinson's—so I panicked at the thought of inheriting Cruetzfeldt-Jakob disease from my father. But I was wrong: I inherited his strength and logical mind.

Thank you Dad. We all love you and will meet this challenge together.

—Erica Mandelbaum

THE EDITOR RESPONDS: Thank you for your letter, Erica. We wish you the best in coping with this illness. For more information on Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, contact:

Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD) Foundation Inc. cjdfoundation.org 1-800-659-1991

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