

The 'Pani-Puri' Cure : an interesting observation

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Developmental disabilities are defined as diverse group of severe chronic conditions due to mental and/or physical impairments. Individuals with developmental disabilities have difficulties with major life activities including language, mobility and learning. These disabilities usually last throughout the person's life [1]. Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) is defined by the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, USA as a group of diverse medical and health care systems, practices and products not presently considered to be a part of conventional medicine. It includes the use of biological based therapies using substances like herbs, vitamins, and foods that have not yet been scientifically studied to treat specific medical conditions [2].

The use of Complementary and alternative medicine has become common these days for a range of conditions right from the common cold to severe illnesses like cancers and chronic illnesses like diabetes etc. But sometimes the use of these alternate therapies by practitioners of mainstream medicine and that too unjustified and lacking any scientific proof dazzles the mind.

A 24 years female, 2nd amongst 3 siblings, studied in a special school for 3 years, single, not working, staying with her parents, was brought to us for certification of mental illness, with history of delayed milestones and deficits in adaptive functioning. The patients' IQ was 55 as measured by the KBI. The patient had a global delay in all her milestones, although not charted by her parents. She started standing without support at the age 8 years and started to speak few words at the age 10-11 years. Currently, she was able to tell sides, would identify basic colors and shapes and would be able to point body parts and count fingers. But was unable to count beyond, did not know the whole alphabet, could not tell the days of the week and months of the year. She was dependent on her care takers for self care as she was unable to dress without mistakes and needed help to comb hair, menstrual care had to be taken by mother. Patient was however toilet trained.

There were no other medical or surgical co-morbidities and no family history of similar illness. The patient was morbidly obese weighing 93 kilograms, her height being 5'2". And on asking the reason to rule out genetic causes her father revealed a rather bizarre thing. The patients family physician had advised the patients' father to make her eat "Pani-puri" to increase her IQ, and what the parents did was gave the patient a free hand to enjoy any amount she would like to have at a nearby vendor. This led to a steep increase in the patients' weight, but hardly had any effect on her intellectual functioning. The physician still advised them to continue as it would gradually show results. But unfortunately for the patient and the parents, she has landed up being morbidly obese, making her care even more difficult. Moreover the patient now has

tantrums and beats her parents if they don't allow her to eat pani-puri, adding to their woes even more.

An extensive literature search using pubmed did not show any mention of the above said suggestion in any form of CAM for raising the intellectual capacity. This case highlights the care one needs to take before one engages on a journey on the less treaded and shaky path of CAM and its overuse can prove a handful.

REFERENCES

1. Accardo PJ, Whitman BY. Dictionary of developmental disabilities terminology. Baltimone; Paul H. Brookes publishing company ; 1996.
2. National Center for Complimentary and Alternative Medicine, USA, <http://nccam.nih.gov>.