



OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1200

HEALTH AFFAIRS

AUG 26 2008

MEMORANDUM FOR PRESIDENT, DEFENSE HEALTH BOARD

SUBJECT: Request to the Defense Health Board Pertaining to Autism Treatment

As stipulated in the John Warner National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2007, the Department of Defense was required to develop a plan to provide services for military dependent children with autism within the authority of the Extended Health Care Option (ECHO) Program. As a result, the Department has launched, via a demonstration project, an expansion of the availability of applied behavior analysis (ABA) services to ECHO beneficiaries.

Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) affect a broad array of fundamental human behaviors, including social interaction and communication, and may present severely restricted interests as well as highly repetitive behavior. Although the condition is poorly understood and there is no known cure, a variety of interventions are available to mitigate the broad spectrum of ASD manifestations. ABA, a widely-studied intervention, is a systemized process of collecting behavioral data and employing a variety of behavioral conditioning techniques to teach and reinforce desired behaviors while eliminating unfavorable conduct.

I request the Defense Health Board review the scientific evidence surrounding ABA and provide comments on the benefits, treatment intensity and duration, as well as short-term and long-term effects associated with ABA. In addition, I request comments regarding areas for further research and any emerging treatments for autism which provide comparable benefit to ABA therapy.

I would appreciate a response from the Board at its earliest convenience. Thank you for your support. My point of contact for this action is Col. Roger Gibson, who can be reached at (703) 681-8448 Ext 1228 or Roger.Gibson@tma.osd.mil.


Dr. Joseph E. Kelley
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs,
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