



Jewish Family Services

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Project GENE—Part III

By Penny Eisenberg

Project GENE, an acronym for Genetics: Everyone Needs Education, is the nationwide program recently launched by B'nai B'rith Women in cooperation with the March of Dimes, to educate the public about birth defects. This series of articles has been prepared by HaLailah B'nai B'rith Women to explain genetic disorders and the research that is being done in the field of genetic disease.

Down's syndrome is the most common genetic birth defect affecting all people regardless of race or economic circumstance. Children born with Down's syndrome are mentally retarded and have physical deformities including thick tongues, flattened heads, small ears, flat noses, heart abnormalities and respiratory problems. Life expectancy is greatly reduced. In normal fetal development an egg and sperm unite to form a child with 46 chromosomes. If the embryo has 47 chromosomes the result will be a child with Down's syndrome. The phenomenon which causes the extra chromosome can happen in any egg or sperm cell which means that children with Down's syndrome are born to normal parents. Those at high risk are parents who already have a baby with Down's syndrome or mothers over the age of 35. If there is reason to be concerned, amniocentesis can be done in the fourth month of pregnancy which will indicate if Down's syndrome is present.

Another common genetic disease is NF or neurofibromatosis. NF occurs in every racial and ethnic group throughout the world and affects both sexes equally. One baby in 3,000 born in the U.S. will develop NF. The disease is characterized by tumors made up of nerve cells that usually begin to appear during adolescence. These tumors may be situated so as to cause blindness, or deafness or may be disfiguring to the face or body. Severe cases such as that presented in the movie "The Elephant Man" are rare indeed. At present there are no means of preventing NF nor of detecting it prenatally. The March of Dimes is funding studies on NF and other diseases of the nervous system. For more information contact The NF Foundation Inc., 70 W 40th Street, NYC NY 10018.

Twenty thousand Americans suffer from Marfan Syndrome, with abnormalities that may affect the heart, blood vessels, lungs, eyes, bones and ligaments. This is an inherited disorder of con-

nective tissue that causes sufferers to have unusually long arms and legs, scoliosis, protruding breastbones and spidery fingers. The greatest threat to these people is death from a sudden split in the aorta. Marfan syndrome is the result of a single abnormal gene usually inherited from one parent. There is no prenatal test for Marfan syndrome nor can it be prevented. Those with family history of the disease should seek genetic counseling.

Thalassemia is one of the most common inherited diseases of the blood. It affects mostly people of Italian or Greek descent and occasionally those of Middle Eastern, Asian and African ancestry. Thalassemia includes several different forms ranging from severe to a form which shows up in blood testing but has no symptoms. Most children with severe Thalassemia appear healthy at birth but soon become pale and listless. Heart failure and infection are leading causes of death. Eventually patients' bones become thin and brittle. Thalassemia is passed on to children by parents who carry the gene. A carrier has one normal gene and one thalassemia gene. Most carriers lead normal lives. If two carriers become parents there is a 25% chance that their child will have a severe form of the disease, a 25% chance that the child will be completely normal, and a 50% chance that the child will be a carrier. Fortunately, blood tests can show if individuals have Thalassemia or are carriers, and amniocentesis can be used to determine if a fetus is affected or normal. Those with history are advised to seek professional advice. Since the gene responsible for Thalassemia has been tagged, the March of Dimes has supported research on gene splicing that may correct the defect. Research has also been done with a drug that can make a normal gene take over for the thalassemia gene. Researchers are hopeful that effective gene treatment

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Thoughts From Adrienne

By Adrienne Rosenberg
JFS Director



"If only my spouse would change."

"My child is so unreasonable."

"If it weren't for the fact that you always upset me, I'd be fine."

"You never listen to me."

"My relatives make me nuts."

"You are going to be the death of me yet."

"After all I've done for you, this is how you pay me back?"

We have all heard or said these things. Yet, the reality is that no one can change what another adult does. We can influence, advise and order; however, when it comes to personal relationships, we can not make anyone do anything they do not want to do. Actually, the only one we can control or change is ourselves. Healthy relationships do not

just happen. They are the result of each person taking responsibility for communication and recognizing that when someone bugs them, it is because they are reacting to the other person's behavior. That reaction is what can be controlled; the other person's behavior can not.

Unfortunately, most of us expect other people to alter how they behave or interact to accommodate our wishes. This makes it easier on us, for then we do not have to experience stress. Often, we react with anger or disgust when we do not understand someone or dislike what someone says or does. Differences between us can become exaggerated and intense. "Why don't you think, feel and act like I do?" we wonder. Or as Professor Higgins stated, "Why can't

women think more like men?" Changing how we relate with the one whose behavior is bothering us is not easy, especially if we believe we're "right". But that is all we have the power to change. Actually, counseling is someone looking at taking responsibility for their own behavior and reactions in the situation they find themselves.

What this means in everyday words is that no one can drive you "nuts" unless you let them; no one is unreasonable unless you define him so; and only I have control over my reactions to how you behave. If I get angry, it's because I choose to do so — not because you've made me lose my cool. I am responsible for how I come across. I choose to either cooperate or not with others I am responsible for myself.

— Special Acknowledgements —

The Chai Group members who so generously gave funds for a family with very little funds.

Temple Beth El V'Shalom Religious School who gave some of their Karen Ami money for a family at Thanksgiving.

The two Temple Israel's Religious Classes who gave Thanksgiving dinners to a needy Jewish family.

All those in our community who regularly visit the homebound and those Jewish persons in non-Jewish nursing homes in our area.

Terms of Office of Three Expire

The month of December will see the end of the term of office of three persons who have been on our Jewish Family Services Committee for over four years. Anita Blumenthal, Dr. Joal Fischer and Moses Luski will be missed. They have contributed much to our Committee and Agency.

Stay Ahead of the Game

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