

TO THE EDITOR

Is the Treatment of Multiple Sclerosis Headed in the Wrong Direction?

With recent explorations into mechanical interventions for patients with multiple sclerosis (MS), I worry that the treatment of MS is headed in the wrong direction. There is emerging interest in chronic cerebrospinal venous insufficiency (CCSVI) as the causative factor in MS, a hypothesis that overlooks the pioneering research of Dr. Roy Laver Swank. The results of his 34-year study published in *The Lancet* in 1990 remain the most effective treatment of multiple sclerosis ever reported in the peer review literature. In patients with early stage MS, 95% were without progression of their disease 34 years after adopting his low saturated fat dietary program.¹ Even patients with initially advanced disease showed significant benefit. To date, no medication or invasive procedure has ever come close to demonstrating such success.

The incidences of multiple sclerosis, heart disease, and stroke have all increased in parallel with fat consumption over the last century. Multiple sclerosis is over 100 times more prevalent in the far north where high fat animal-based diets are consumed than it is at the equator where low fat plant-based nutrition predominates.² Some of Dr. Swank's earliest research showed that a single high fat meal caused the red blood cells to aggregate and sludge³ rendering the perivascular territories most susceptible to insult, which is precisely the distribution we see with MS lesions. The frequency of MS has repeatedly been found to be directly related to the amount of saturated animal fat consumed daily in various countries.⁴

Is the profound cerebral hypoperfusion that we see in multiple sclerosis reversible with dietary intervention? This is an example of where research should be focused. Instead, angioplasties and stents are now being used to treat CCSVI, which is at best another sequela of this illness. Medications continue to be the cornerstone of treatment despite their marginal benefits, adverse reactions, and high costs. Complementary and alternative therapies are used by as many as 70% of MS patients.⁵ Therapeutic eclecticism reflects symptomatic treatment, which is suboptimal. We should be building on Dr. Swank's work if we want to cure this disease.

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