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Sleep disorders may cause ADD/ADHD

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Special to The Courier

For more than three decades, there has been a growing recognition that some people have difficulty focusing and maintaining attention; in various instances, they also may have difficulty sitting peacefully in a classroom or calm setting. These individuals have been labeled with attention deficit disorder – with or without hyperactivity – known as ADD/ADHD.

Traditional treatment for ADD/ADHD has been with stimulant medications, such as Ritalin or Adderall, which provides improvement by stimulating a fatigued, unrested brain. It is now known that problems with sleep can result in difficulties with concentration and the ability to stay focused during the day. The increased physical activity – hyperactivity – displayed by

many of those affected is a way of remaining stimulated, thus overcoming the sleepiness. This difficulty is most noted when sitting inactive and under-stimulated.

About 30 percent of these patients have a sleep disturbance as a fundamental cause, according to Jerald H. Simmons, M.D., an inter-

nationally recognized neurologist and sleep disorders specialist. Simmons is director of the Sadler Clinic Sleep Disorders Center and has been among the first who have understood the association between ADD/ADHD and sleep disturbances. He has treated these types of patients for about 20 years.

If a sleep disorder is present, there are other treatment op-

tions for improvement of the ADD/ADHD symptoms.

“If there is a concern that a child or adult has ADD/ADHD, then it is imperative to first make a few observations regarding the person’s sleep in order to determine whether a sleep disorder center consultation is necessary, prior to starting stimulant drugs,” Simmons said. “In many cases, those who have been placed on stimulants can be successfully taken off them if a sleep problem has been properly diagnosed and treated. For years now, I have taken this approach and many patients labeled with ADD/ADHD in whom we have diagnosed with a sleep disturbance have demonstrated dramatic improvement after treating the sleep disorder. This treatment has minimized or eliminated their reliance on stimulant medications.”

The main causes for the disturbed sleep in the ADD/AD-

HD population is from: a lack of enough sleep because of conditions in the home stemming from domestic/environmental factors; restless legs syndrome or obstructive sleep apnea or an associated condition known as the upper airway resistance syndrome, according to Simmons.

UARS is a subtle breathing disorder not properly diagnosed at most sleep centers; but because Simmons’ centers utilize extra measures, his team is able to recognize and treat this disorder properly.

“We look at a whole battery of issues when someone complains of ADD/ADHD, including psychological and physiological factors,” Simmons said. “I’ve seen many patients improve when we treat their sleep without the need for stimulants.”

An example of one such patient is Trey Girlinghouse, a 9-year-old whose teachers be-

came concerned with his difficulties in school. They encouraged his mother to find medical assistance for what they labeled as ADD. He was placed on stimulant medication treatment; however, his mother was concerned about medication usage and looked for alternative treatments. She had Trey evaluated by Simmons; and after a comprehensive sleep test, he was found to have UARS. He then began treatment for this breathing disorder and is no longer on stimulants and has markedly improved his performance at school.

“Now that his sleep is better and he does better at school, the teachers agree that he no longer needs to be on medications,” his mother Angela Girlinghouse said.

Simmons provides a partial list of signs that should raise concern when considering whether ADD/ADHD may be from a disturbance with sleep.

These are:

- Difficulty falling asleep
- Difficulty staying asleep
- Snoring or labored breathing
- Kicking repetitively during the night
- Excessively grinding or clenching teeth
- Difficulty awakening in the morning
- Sleep walking or sleep talking
- Noticeable sleepiness during the day when not active

“If someone has any of these indicators and appears to suffer with ADD/ADHD symptoms, then a proper sleep evaluation would be warranted,” Simmons said.

Patients can be evaluated by contacting the Sadler Clinic Sleep Disorders Center at 281-297-6305 or visiting www.HoustonSleep.net for more information and where they can fill out a questionnaire to initiate an evaluation.



SIMMONS