



# Executive Director's Column

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## *Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Choice*

I am not usually a political person. Once, I had to be tutored to go on a date with an influential Democrat. But this election year is different. I fear the possible loss of my freedom to choose and to speak more than I fear terrorists. In the past few weeks, people have challenged my and my colleagues' freedom to express our philosophies, methodologies and beliefs.

### What is Freedom?

Merriam-Webster defines *freedom* as "the power to speak, think or act without externally imposed restraints." When our forefathers wrote the Bill of Rights over 200 years ago, they guaranteed us various freedoms, some of which are now in jeopardy.

### Freedom of Speech

It is no accident that Freedom of Speech is the first freedom in the First Amendment. The Constitution's framers saw freedom of expression as the hallmark of a democratic society, according to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).

A year ago, Joyce Riley, a long-time supporter of alternative approaches to learning disabilities, invited me to present a workshop on Non-Verbal Learning Disabilities (NLD) in October to the Learning Disabilities Association (LDA) of California Fall Conference. I have been a member of LDA for over 30 years, and Joyce had read my article on NLD (See 8:1)

Following the distribution of the conference brochure, which listed a provocative title for my session, Joyce was hounded by emails protesting my presentation. Why? Because I questioned the diagnosis, and suggested that NLD might be mitigated by movement and vision therapies. Some incensed NLD advocates waged an Internet campaign demanding that I be stricken as a speaker. Thanks to Joyce's commitment to me and my stance, the program proceeded without incident, to a packed, welcoming audience. Still, the President of California LDA felt compelled to apologize in her newsletter on my behalf.

Suppose even one of those who protested my talk had bothered to contact me. Instead of throwing temper tantrums, we might have had the opportunity for dialogue. Even better, we might have learned something!

The same week, DDR cancelled a program on "Treating ADD without Drugs." Why? Because someone learned that several years ago, quackbusters had suspended the medical license of Charles Gant, our keynote speaker. She assumed him guilty as charged.

What this uninformed person did not learn was that Gant spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to recoup his license, so that he could help more patients. Gant is proud to be one of many fine physicians who have been harrassed for exercising their freedom of speech. Fortunately, these doctors care more about relationships with their patients than with their pharmaceutical reps. Drs. Robert Sinaiko, James Gordon, Devi Nambutripad, Viola Frymann and John Upledger are just a few who have also been targeted.

Izzy Kalman believes that much of the fighting in our schools and on our playgrounds is a result of the lack of freedom of speech (see page 5). He says "freedom of speech" is just a slogan today. Remember when kids called each other names, and "sticks and stones could break our bones, but names could never hurt us?" Today's kids, prohibited from using "bad" words, must resort to stronger means to exercise their rights of expression.

### Freedom of Choice

Freedom of religion is the law of the land, but other important choices are also at stake. Many parents demand that the freedom to choose a vaccination schedule tailored to their children's needs should be their right in a democracy. How many more innocent children have to become autistic or disabled before the medical community admits that mass vaccination is harming the health of future generations.

### What You Can Do

- **Whenever feeling pressured to make a forced choice, take time to think it over.** You have this option in all medical situations. Once a physician makes a diagnosis, there are many treatments to consider. Learn about all of them.
- **Support those who advocate for the causes you believe in.** As you consider year-end donations, make them to organizations that fight for your freedoms. Wear their t-shirts and be a mobile billboard.
- **Use the media to your advantage.** Subscribe to magazines and newsletters that give you the latest information, not the status quo. If you view or read anything that you find disturbing, take time to write an e-mail or letter in protest. Look what happened when people rallied around Alan Yurko, and bombarded CBS about their unprofessional handling of the vaccine-autism connection.
- **Walk the walk. Talk the talk.** Be an advocate for freedoms of all kinds. Volunteer for good causes and be an example to your kids. Help them understand their heritage and what our forefathers fought so hard to win. Let's not lose it now!