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I certainly hope that the Committee on Infectious Diseases will not recommend that children be allowed to attend school when they have evidence of pediculosis. This will reverse the modest gains we have made in lice control in some areas. Relaxation would seem to be based on several flawed assumptions:

1. "Lice and nits are easy to detect." Not true! Even with magnifiers, lice can be notoriously difficult to find. I recommend using a fine-toothed metal comb not only for treatment but for diagnosis. It can be examined under a dissecting microscope or low power of a light microscope for lice and nits. The most productive areas to sample are the hair at the nape and above the ears. Any lice in the comb can be killed by pouring boiling water over the comb for a few seconds; prolonged boiling is not necessary. The comb can be cleaned with an ultrasonic jewelry cleaner (\$40 or less at a department store) and an isopropanol bath. Shaking all the lice and nits free may take a few hours. A pin may help clean the teeth. Waxed dental floss may clog the grooves between the teeth of the comb.

2. "Topical pediculocides are effective." Patently not true! Lice have evolved resistance to these products. In my area, they are resistant to 10 times the concentration as in one popular product. This resistance was predictable because the medical, public health, and education professionals have not coordinated their counterattacks. Thus, some lice were always escaping lethal doses of products. The strong survived exposure to sub-lethal doses, and resistance rapidly evolved.

3. "Lice do not carry diseases." This is trying to make the problem go away by redefining it (A.K.A. "spin")! Having a blood-sucking parasite that causes pruritis IS a "disease". Head lice spread impetigo. The treatment is not benign, either, as the article rightly noted.

4. "Parents will tolerate lousy children in school." This is naïve in the extreme! The presence of a potential source of lice in a school is a source of consternation for many parents. Allowing one child to infest others is patently unfair.

With the advent of effective combs, we have a way to efficiently rid children of their lice and nits. Suffocating substances probably help in the effort, but their efficacy is undocumented. Lice enter a state of slowed metabolism ("sham death") when deprived of oxygen. They can live under water for more than 24 hours. The main ingredient needed for de-lousing is "elbow grease", and the new combs do not require nearly as much of it as the plastic ones that have been foisted on the public by the manufacturers of topical (former) pediculocides.

We can win the battle against lice. We need to arm the public with the proper tools, coordinate our attacks, and bring overwhelming force to bear. We can give no quarter to these resilient enemies. No nits in school!

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