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Therapeutic Delight

By Brian S. Pound, MB, BS, LRCP, MRCS, LMCC

Bill was 40 years old, four feet tall and weighed 265 pounds. He was almost as wide as he was tall. He was not very happy. His only interest in life was to eat. Bill would do anything for food: steal, lie and manipulate to get food. He would raid garbage cans, steal food and money to buy food. Bill had Prader-Willi syndrome, a genetic disorder characterized by short stature, mental retardation, hypotonia, abnormally small hands and feet, hypogonadism and uncontrolled appetite leading to extreme obesity. The only treatment available was to guard him 24 hours a day — not much of a life for his sister who was also his lifelong guardian and caregiver.

I had been wondering about the mechanism by which the drug bupropion switched off nicotine cravings so successfully. I learned of the existence of “addiction centres” in the hypothalamus; it seems there are “switch on” and “switch off” controls in the brain. I wondered if I could switch off Bill’s craving for food using bupropion.

Bill’s sister agreed to give the drug a try. Imagine our surprise and delight when, after only two weeks, Bill had become more appropriate with his eating habits. He was much happier and wasn’t manipulating his sister to obtain food. To the best of her knowledge, he had not stolen any food or money to buy food.

Over the next few weeks, Bill’s weight dropped steadily. Two years later, Bill weighs in between 130 and 135 pounds. He is proud of his new body and roars with laughter when I call him a “skinny bugger.”

The greatest joy for me was when Bill said, “Thank you Dr. Pound. I feel more alive now; I enjoy getting up in the morning now.” ☑

Dr. Pound is a family practitioner in Victoria, British Columbia.

Do you have any unforgettable moments?

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