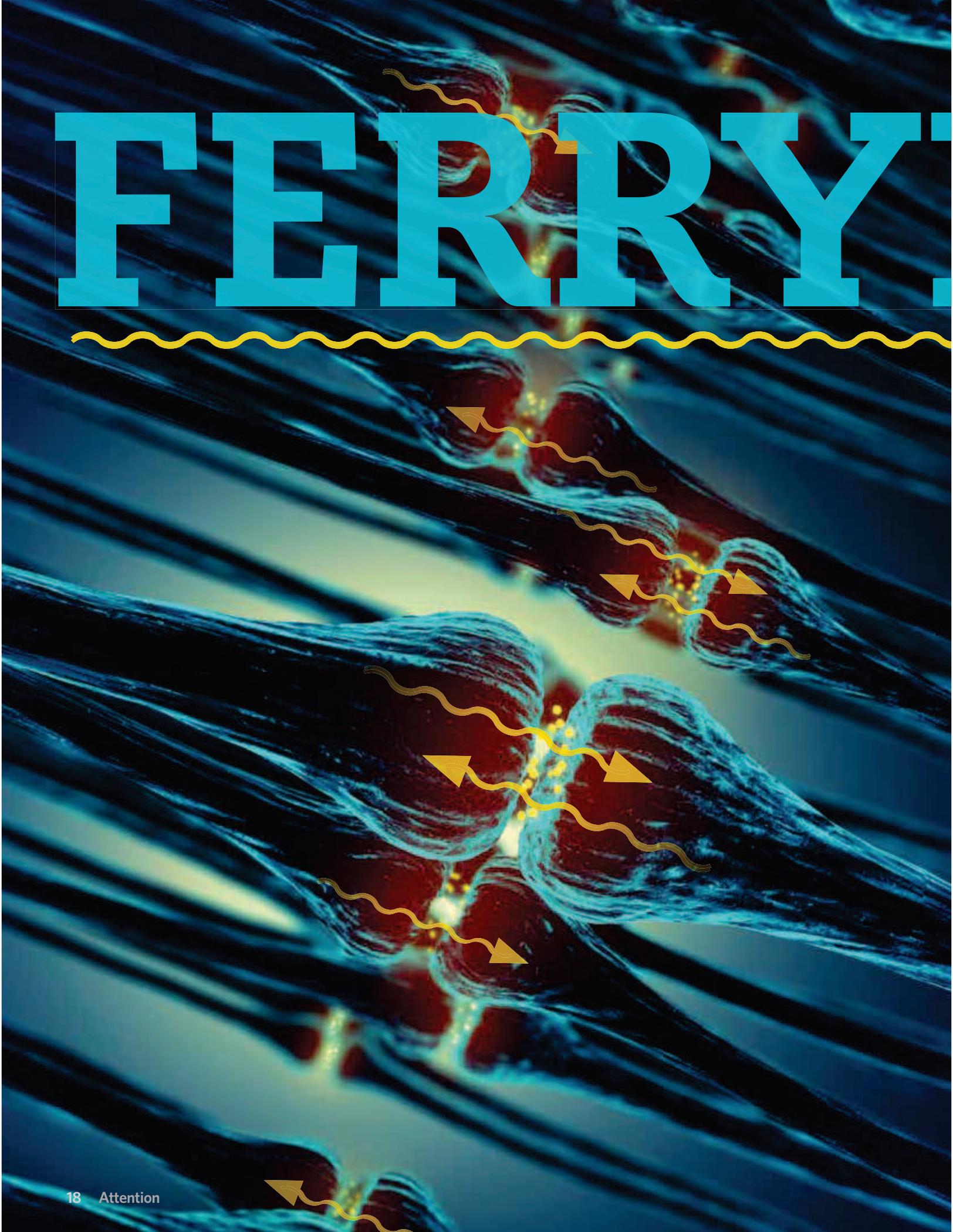


FERRY!



BOATS

A Different Way to Explain the Role of ADHD Medication

by Zara Harris, MS, OT

I HAVE FOUND IT USEFUL to have a way to talk to both parents and kids about medication and the role it plays in reducing ADHD symptoms. With the exception of one student, who thought I was talking about “fairies” not “ferries,” I have found this a helpful tool to give language to the difficult and complex subject of neurotransmitters.

I start by explaining that everything that we do or think about is controlled by nerves; that our whole body is full of nerve fibers that connect to one another and have their headquarters in the brain. I explain how the messages flow along those nerve fibers in a sort of electrical current. But when the message has to go from one nerve to another nerve, there is a gap and the message has to cross the gap in a special way. I explain that it is like loading a car onto a ferryboat to cross a river or channel where there is no bridge.

Then we talk about ferryboats. They are specialized in what they do; they just go back and forth across a body of water, loading and unloading their cargo at either side. You would not want to go fishing or take a cruise in one of these boats, nor would you want to water ski behind them. They are just for ferrying.

I then explain that often people with ADHD have a ferryboat problem. They have very good messages travelling along their nerves, but when they get to these gaps, the ferryboats have broken down, gotten stuck in port, are



running on a holiday schedule, and so forth. Therefore, the messages just don't get across the gap very efficiently.

Most ADHD medications work by producing more ferryboats. They don't change the message or the messenger, they just provide more ferryboats when they are in the person's body, making those thoughts and actions more efficient. I will often highlight that they do not make someone any smarter, just more efficient. For example, if you did not study in preparation for your math test you won't miraculously be able to pass. But if you did study, you may be able to recall what you studied more effectively.

We then discuss how it is important to find the right kind of ferryboat that goes at the right speed for a person, and so it can take a bit of time to find just the right type and the right quantity of ferryboats. 🚢

*Pediatric occupational therapist **Zara Harris** is based in Fayetteville, Arkansas. Licensed in both the United States and the United Kingdom, she has had over thirty years of experience. Harris has worked with international schools on three different continents.*