

HEALTH

Kids on ADHD drugs: A dangerous path to addiction

By Evelyn Pringle
Online Journal Contributing Writer

Apr 7, 2006, 22:27

Experts say the stimulant drugs prescribed for the treatment of ADHD are not only dangerous, they are highly addictive. And although no drug has been approved for the treatment of autism, drugs are routinely prescribed off-label to treat autistic children.

According to the National Center for Health Statistics, over the period of five years between 1997 and 2002, the number of children between the age of 3 to 17, diagnosed with ADHD went from 3.3 million to 4.4 million.

In direct correlation, the number of children prescribed ADHD drugs also rose steadily. In fact, spending on these types of medications for children is now higher than spending on antibiotics and asthma drugs. In February 2006, the FDA revealed that between 1999 and 2003, 78 million prescriptions for ADHD drugs were written for children between the ages of 1 to 18. Terry Davis, a member of an FDA advisory committee, has said prescriptions for ADHD drugs filled annually have a value of \$3.1 billion.

According to Dr. Peter Breggin, author of "Talking Back To Ritalin," "parents and teachers and even doctors have been badly misled by drug company marketing practices." He warns, "Drug companies have targeted children as a big market likely to boost profits and children are suffering as a result."

What critics say is most alarming: very young children are being placed on drugs. A study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association in 2000 provides some insight into this trend. The study found that 57 percent of 223 Michigan Medicaid patients younger than 4, diagnosed with ADHD, received at least one psychotropic drug during a 15-month period in 1995 to 1996.

Additionally, the study found that in the Medicaid population in Midwestern states, there was a threefold increase in the prescribing of stimulant drugs between 1991 and 1995 for children between the ages of 2 and four.

More recent statistics show a 369 percent increase in spending on ADHD drugs for children under 5. From 2000 to 2003, the rise in the use of attention deficit drugs by children under 5 contributed to an overall 23 percent increase for all children, according to an analysis by the nation's largest prescription benefit manager, Medco Health Solutions.

The debate over the drugging of children in this country has been raging for years. Schools have been accused of promoting the use of drugs to control normal but active children. At a September 26, 2002, House Reform Committee hearing on the "Overmedication of Hyperactive Children," Chairman Dan Burton (R-IN), asked pediatrician Dr. Mary Ann Block, "What have you found that the schools do specifically to encourage the use of medications for attention and behavior?"

Dr. Block said, "Parents that come to me report consistently that the teachers and the principals and even the school nurses pressure them to go to a physician and get their child labeled and drugged."

"Some schools," she said, "are giving lectures to parents, inviting parents to come hear talks about diagnosing and drugging their children for ADHD."

Congressman Burton pointed out what he considered to be inadequate and unscientific methods of diagnosing ADHD: "When you take your child to a doctor, instead of blood tests and a thorough medical evaluation, you have a conversation with a doctor about the school's checklist. And you leave a few minutes later with a prescription for your young child for a psychotropic drug."

"Did the doctor test your child for a thyroid disorder? Did your doctor test your child for a heavy metal toxicity? Did your doctor talk to you about your child's allergies?"

"Did your doctor even mention nutrition or possible food sensitivity? Did your doctor ask if your child's IQ had been tested and if he was gifted? Probably not," he said.

Sandra Lucas testifies at FDA advisory committee hearings on behalf of the Citizens Commission on Human Rights, a psychiatric watchdog group. She produced a copy of a January 20, 2005, pamphlet used at a training seminar for teachers composed by Susan Barton, who billed herself as the "Founder of Bright Solutions for Dyslexia," located in San Jose, California.

Under Medication for ADD, Ms Barton states, "Medication is the most often an essential component to effective treatment for the ADD child."

"As I've said many times now," she told the teachers, "ADD is a neurobiological disorder and needs to be treated as such."

Ms Barton also says that without medication, other interventions are ineffective, and claims: "This medication does not cause illegal drug use or addiction."

Dr. Fred Baughman, author of "The ADHD Fraud -- How Psychiatry Makes Patients of Normal Children," and one of the nation's leading experts on the issue, vehemently disagrees. He calls the medical practice of ADHD a fraud -- "one in which the FDA was fully complicit."

"ADHD doesn't exist -- it is not a physical abnormality," he explains, "and as such bears no risk of causing physical injury or death as does every drug used in its treatment."

In testimony on behalf of the International Center for the Study of Psychiatry and Psychology, at the March 22 and 23, 2006, FDA advisory committee hearings on the dangers of ADHD drugs, Dr. Baughman asked the panel of experts to "give us the reference, cite to the article, giving proof that ADHD is a disease."

He also asked the committee to give the reference, or cite the literature, that describes the test that provides objective evidence that children diagnosed with ADHD have a disease.

The silence in the hearing room was deafening. According to Dr. Baughman, no one answered his questions because there is no study, test, or scientific literature to back up the assertion that ADHD is a disease.

"ADHD is not a disease," Dr. Baughman says. "This being the case," he maintains, "giving such drugs for ADHD is not 'help' or 'treatment.'"

He makes the point "that all practice of medicine begins with diagnosis."

"Informed consent," Dr. Baughman explained, "demands not just a description of the drugs or surgery to be used but of the condition they are to be used on -- its prognosis and how that natural course/prognosis is likely to be altered by the treatments to be applied."

At the March 2006, FDA advisory committee hearings, it was noted that no other countries are drugging children with stimulants. In fact, psychiatrist, Dr. Grace Jackson, who also testified at the hearing, explains in her book, "Rethinking Psychiatric Drugs," how in 1996 and 1997, the World Health Organization issued press releases about the rise in the use of the stimulant Ritalin in this country, "noting that the United States was responsible for 90 percent of the drug's production and consumption."

At the time, the International Narcotics Control Board identified a number of concerns about America's use of the drug, including the dangers of: "inappropriate diagnosis of ADHD; widely divergent prescribing patterns; off-label prescribing to children under six; and excessive duration of treatment," Dr. Jackson reports.

A report by the FDA released in February 2006, said that between 1999 and 2003, there were 25 deaths in persons using ADHD drugs, including the deaths of 19 children. The FDA also reported receiving more than 50 cases of cardiovascular problems, including stroke, heart attack, hypertension, palpitations and arrhythmia.

Because only between 1 and 10 percent of adverse events are ever reported to the FDA, the above numbers represent an extreme understatement of actual cases of harm, critics point out.

According to the Drug Abuse Warning Network, there were only 271 Ritalin-related emergency room visits in 1990, but there were 1,478 Ritalin-related emergency visits recorded in 2001.

In 1999, the National Institute of Drug Abuse, found some 165 Ritalin-related poison calls in Detroit and 419 cases in Texas. Of the nearly 600 calls, only 114 cases involved intentional misuse or abuse.

Dr. Breggin maintains that ADHD drugs actually bring on the symptoms they are supposed to treat such as hyperactivity, impulsivity and inattention, which can lead to a vicious cycle of incorrect and dangerous dosage increases, he warns.

In addition, Dr. Breggin says, stimulants can cause "agitation and irritability, anger, hostility, disinhibition, hypomania and mania."

A recent review of data by the FDA seems to verify Dr. Breggin's assertions. The FDA found that children on ADHD drugs had an increased risk of psychosis, a mental disorder characterized by the inability to distinguish between real and imaginary events. The most important finding, the FDA said, was that signs of psychosis or mania, particularly hallucinations, occurred in patients with no risk factors at the usual doses of any of the drugs used to treat ADHD.

The FDA found a "substantial portion of the psychosis-related cases were reported to occur in children 10 years or less," an age group which does not typically suffer from psychosis, the FDA said.

From January 2000 through June 30, 2005, the FDA identified nearly 1,000 reports of psychosis or mania possibly linked to the drugs, including Ritalin, Adderall, Concerta, and Strattera.

Most of people who have investigated the matter seem to agree that heavy metal poisoning is by far the most likely cause of the epidemic in autism spectrum disorders that erupted in the 1990s. Studies show that the mercury-based preservative thimerosal that was used in all childhood vaccines until recently and is the likely culprit.

Beginning in the late 1980s, the CDC began adding more and more vaccines to the immunization schedule, but failed to keep track of the toxic levels of mercury that children would receive as each new shot was added to the list or the amount of mercury that infants would receive when three-in-one shots were injected.

Nancy and Tim Hokkanen are the parents of Andy, a 6-year-old boy who was diagnosed with autism but who is now recovering from mercury poisoning. In June 2002, a neurologist prescribed Adderal for Andy.

"My son became psychotic," Nancy said, "for four days by mid-afternoon he had to be held down in a dark quiet room while he screamed himself limp."

Next the neurologist prescribed Ritalin, saying, "Usually if one drug doesn't work, the other one does," Nancy continued.

"My instincts told me that this was another disaster in the making," she said, "so I quit seeing that neurologist and began reading studies."

Nancy discovered the theory of mercury poisoning published by chemistry experts Boyd Haley, PhD, and Andrew Hall Cutler, PhD, in the study, "Autism: a novel form of mercury poisoning," which documents about 100 matching symptoms.

In November 2002, when Andy was 4 and-a-half, tests were done on Andy's hair, blood, urine and stool samples, and the test results showed mercury toxicity as well as high levels of copper and other metals, and various nutritional insufficiencies.

Within two weeks of giving Andy supplements including Vitamin B-6, zinc, manganese and magnesium, he showed drastic improvements in mood, behavior and abilities, Nancy says.

"We had an almost-normal Christmas," she reported, "without tantrums and bizarre behavior."

The Hokkenans estimate that their insurance company was billed about \$100,000 for therapy to treat autism. "However, we never noticed any drastic improvement until we began biomedical treatment, which has cost about \$2,000," Nancy says.

"Strangely," she notes, "our insurance company wouldn't cover the costs of those medical tests."

Nancy says that since public health officials realized their error of failing to keep track of the toxic mercury levels in vaccines in 1999, she views the failure to restrict the use of mercury in vaccines as a form of fatal entrenchment -- "when an unhealthy practice or norm is allowed to continue," she explained, "simply because it has been done that way for so long."

In addition to all the other side effects associated with ADHD drugs, Dr. David Stein, author of "Unraveling the ADD/ADHD Fiasco," says stimulant drugs are "near the top of the heap of potentially addictive drugs."

He says, "We have no way of knowing which child has a potential risk for becoming addicted to drugs."

Recent studies have shown that more and more students are using the drugs illegally. In 2004, a nationwide University of Michigan study on non-medical use of amphetamines, found 4.9 percent of 8th graders had used stimulants in the previous year, 8.5 percent of 10th graders had used the drugs, and one in 10 seniors admitted to non-medical use of amphetamines.

The Partnership for a Drug Free America released the results of a survey in 2005 that polled more than 7,300 teenagers and found one in 10 teenagers, or 2.3 million young people, had tried ADHD drugs without a doctor's prescription, and that 29 percent of those surveyed said they had close friends who had abused the drugs.

Experts agree that the widespread prescribing of stimulants will lead many children down the path to addiction and they warn of the perils that will follow.

"Psychology and psychiatry have extremely poor track records for treating abuse and addiction problems," Dr. Stein notes, "and, therefore, the very drugs they are recommending can trigger a problem from which there may be no return."

If medical professionals begin telling children at a very young age that they can change the way they think, feel, and behave by simply taking a pill, they will logically continue to take drugs in attempt to mood-alter whenever they have problems in life.

Evelyn Pringle is a columnist for Independent Media TV and an investigative journalist focusing on exposing corruption in government.

Copyright © 1998-2007 Online Journal

[Email Online Journal Editor](#)