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Ritalin Is Dangerous

When you think of Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD as it is more commonly called, what do you think of? Do you think of a child (generally a male child) who is extremely disruptive in a classroom setting and has trouble concentrating? Then, if asked, "What do you do to treat a child with ADHD?" Most people today would simply say, "Well, let's put the kid on Ritalin and that should calm him down." Just putting a child on Ritalin is a stimulant and is not always the safest and most effective way of treating children with ADHD. Ritalin is also a very dangerous medication that is highly addictive and should not be prescribed to young children for extended periods of time. The long term effects of prescribing this medication could include brain altering changes, withdrawal symptoms when taken off the medication, and even death in extreme cases. In order to be better informed about the dangers of the use of stimulants when treating ADHD, both parents of young children as well as adults dealing with this disorder must become better informed as to what ADHD and Ritalin are as well as how Ritalin is not always the best way to treat the disorder.

All too often, ADHD is diagnosed without making a proper assessment of what the child's true symptoms could be.

According to Raulin (2003) the diagnosis of ADHD occurs more frequently in boys than in girls and at a rate of anywhere from 2:1 to as high as 9:1. Raulin also mentions an extensive list of symptoms that must be present when making a diagnosis of ADHD. On the attention side of ADHD, these symptoms can include making careless mistakes, difficulty maintaining attention, not appearing to listen when spoken to, difficulty finishing assignments, avoiding tasks that require effort, misplaces important items (such as car keys or books), distracted easily by other happenings, and extreme absentmindedness. On the hyperactivity side, symptoms can include fidgeting, leaving ones seat at inappropriate times, difficulty playing peacefully, runs or climbs at inappropriate times, excessive talking, acts as if "driven by a motor," says answers to questions before the question is finished, cannot wait his or her turn, and interrupts other people's conversations.

It is also to be known that while ADHD is a common disorder in today's society, it is still not known what exactly causes the disorder. Raulin (2003) suggests that children affected with ADHD have a smaller brain capacity than those children who do not have ADHD. Another possibility could be that children with ADHD have some form of brain damage that causes the brain

to function differently than an undamaged brain. To this day, there is still ongoing research as to the primary cause of ADHD.

Ritalin, along with a similar drug called Adderall, are the "wonder drugs" that are commonly prescribed to treat both children and adults with ADHD. These medication are stimulants and what they medication does is supposedly balance the chemical functions of the brain in order to lessen the symptoms of ADHD. According to Ebstart (2004), Ritalin allows its user to focus better for the short term, but not for longer periods of time.

But what happens when Ritalin is prescribed for longer periods of time. Today, there is more and more research being done to figure out what the long term effects of taking Ritalin can be. One adverse effect is some of the reactions a child may immediately face when taking a stimulant drug like Ritalin. According to Breggin (1995) these affects can include obsessive-compulsive symptoms (i.e. not flexible thought process, narrow mindedness, and compulsiveness), social withdrawal, and a suppressed behavior compared to other supposedly normal children. These normal traits in other children, when no longer seen in the child who is on Ritalin, is seen as desirable, yet may have long term detrimental effects for the child, such as difficulty making friends and difficulty thinking clearly off the medication.

Ritalin, when prescribed, is also not usually taken properly. In order to minimize any possible long term side affects, doctors will usually recommend a lower or no dosage of the medication over vacations. Some physical side effects that can be linked to Ritalin include a higher heart rate, hypertension, nausea, panic states and panic attacks, sweating, headaches, dry mouth, nose, and eyes, and confusion. In order to make it appear as thought the drug is more effective, Ritalin is often advertised to correct chemical imbalances and improve the overall functioning of the brain. However, to this day there still is no conclusive evidence to prove that this actually takes place (Breggin, 1995).

But what about Ritalin in comparison to other drugs out there today? There are two common illegal drugs that Ritalin is said to have similar affects as: cocaine and speed. According to Breggin (1995) when compared in a clinical laboratory setting, the effects of the three drugs causes them to be difficult to distinguish between. As with any addictive drug, there are some severe withdrawal effects that occur when a person stops taking these drugs. These can include depression, exhaustion, irritability, and the thoughts of suicide in the user. Users of the drug have also reported to crash, which means that these affects come on suddenly and without warning when the drugs are stopped.

Studies have also shown that prescriptions, such as Ritalin, have been known to cause the same disorders they are there to supposedly cure. When this happens, the child is often given either a higher dose of the Ritalin, or another, much stronger drug. Both increasing a dose of Ritalin as well as prescribing a stronger drug to counteract the symptoms can cause an increase the toxicity of the drug as well as make it harder for the person taking the medication to get off of the medication (Breggin, 1995).

One of the latest developments in the treatment of ADHD is the number of lawsuits stemming from the apparent over diagnosis of the disorder as well as the apparent over prescription of medications for treatment, such as Ritalin. One lawsuit specifically stems from a Ritalin-related death that occurred in a fourteen year old boy a few years ago. According to the lawsuit, Ritalin was to be blamed for a total of 160 death, and 590 trips to the hospital with 36 of those visits being classified as life threatening (Baughman, 2001). There is also a list to show the occurrence of the most common side affects and approximately how often they occur.

But what do the Ritalin advocates say about the medication? Many of them claim that there is no evidence that Ritalin leads to substance abuse, despite evidence to prove the contrary, that ADHD is a brain disorder that must be corrected with

medications, that medications are used to focus attention to improve academic performance, and that adverse reactions to the medications only occur in less than one percent of the total population of users. Advocates for the drug have also been known to claim that the whole "bad rap" Ritalin and other similar medications have been getting is due to a propaganda campaign that was lead by the increased prevalence of the medication being described in the media. They also state that because of this, the drug has not been able to be reclassified as a non addictive drug (Barkley, 2000).

Another point that the advocates have been known to use in their pro-Ritalin campaign is the fact that Ritalin cures the problem. What they fail to mention, however, is that there is no conclusive evidence to prove or disprove this theory. They also claim that children do not often complain of feeling "funny" nor do they show signs of a different mood when taking the medication. Again, they fail to give statistical evidence to back this theory up, rather it is just stated and assumed to be correct.

So what can be done to solve this Ritalin over prescription epidemic? The first thing people can do is to do research into what the mediation does and what some of the possible dangerous side effects of using such a drug can be. They can also research alternatives to treating ADHD without medications.

These treatments can include a treatment known as behavior modification therapy. Lastly, they can research support groups and organizations such as C.H.A.D.D. (Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorder) in order to help them make the right decisions on whether a medication such as Ritalin would be beneficial to either themselves or their children.

Organizations like C.H.A.D.D. are set up to help normal people with limited medical knowledge to understand what exactly ADHD is and what can be done to help people who have the disorder.

Ritalin is perhaps the most famous and most commonly over prescribed medication to treat ADHD in today's society. When prescribed to children for long periods of time it can also have many harmful and long lasting effects. After all, who are we to distinguish between "normal boy behavior" or "normal kid behavior" and a child with ADHD? The line between the two seems to get finer and finer with each passing year. However, with constant vigilance combined with further research and education about the disorder, the true effects of Ritalin will be discovered and hopefully more parents will make an informed decision about the drug and chose to not put their child on the harmful drug known as Ritalin.

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