

## Case 6

Not too long ago, drugs like Ritalin and Adderall were used exclusively to treat children (and some adults) with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Those affected by these disorders have difficulty concentrating on particular tasks. For instance, children with ADD or ADHD are unable to stay on task in school and are often unable to complete their work at the same pace as other children. Drugs, such as Ritalin and Adderall, help such children remain focused in school. They work by increasing levels of dopamine, a neurotransmitter, in parts of the brain. Among other things, dopamine controls attention and helps maintain concentration. Children who might otherwise perform poorly in school can be benefited tremendously by such drugs.

However, in the past few years, it is not uncommon to find drugs such as Ritalin and Adderall on college and high school campuses, being used by students who are not affected by ADD or ADHD. Students use the drugs to help them study longer with greater focus and efficiency. For this purpose, Ritalin and Adderall are better than traditional stimulants, such as caffeine. According to Dr. Eric Heiligstein, director of clinical psychiatry at the University of Wisconsin, “Students are able to accumulate more information in a shorter time frame. These drugs keep you awake longer. They minimize fatigue and help maintain a high performance level.” One Yale University junior credits Adderall with allowing him to read 576-page *Crime & Punishment* and write a fifteen page paper on the novel in only thirty hours.

The practice of taking medications intended to treat ADD/ADHD has been criticized, not just because of the drugs’ risks (increased heart rate, elevated blood pressure and insomnia, to name a few), but because of its ethical implications. Dr. Heiligstein argues that using Adderall or Ritalin to improve one’s academic performance is simply cheating, just as using steroids in an athletic event is cheating.

However, many students reject the claim that using ADD drugs is cheating, arguing that Ritalin and Adderall are not at all unlike another other kinds of stimulants or study aids that students routinely use. “These drugs are study tools, just like tutors and caffeine pills,” said one Central Florida student. “We use what’s available to us. It’s not cheating.”

Aside from the cheating-related concerns, others, such as Dr. Judy Illes, senior research scholar at Stanford University’s Center for Biomedical Ethics, worry about the potential for coercion to keep up with those who enhance their ability through ADD medications or other available mind-enhancing drugs. The use of steroids in sports suggests that the pressure to remain competitive may fuel the demand for such drugs in academics.