Beneficial Effects of Medication over Therapy

Good morning fellow bloggers. I haven’t been posting recently because I’ve been plagued with a personal dilemma about my eight year old son. My husband and I have different opinions on the situation but I feel as though I may have won him over when I explained to him that CBT, or cognitive behavioral therapy for the treatment of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder has not been proven to be effective. After seeing my son struggle in class with directions and inability to maintain friendships due to his rowdy behavior and lack of patience to wait his turn, I chose to speak to a counselor. From there, Michael went through an evaluation and diagnosed ADHD hyperactive-impulsive type. Based on the symptoms Michael experienced on a daily basis, his diagnoses made sense. The psychiatrist explained to my husband and me that ADHD is short for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder in which three diagnoses may be given; inattentive, hyperactive-impulsive, and combined type. Not surprisingly, boys are diagnosed with ADHD twice as much as girls are (1). Due to the fact that hearing this information did not come as shock to us, we decided to tackle the situation head on and discuss treatment. Cognitive behavioral therapy aims to build time, relationship, and stress management skills in those struggling with ADHD, whereas stimulant medication works in a completely different manner and solely affects the brain. After some thorough research I came to the conclusion that over the years there have been many new approaches to treatment that focus on behavioral therapy to modify existing behaviors and adjust old ones, but the most effective way remains through the use of medication.

While it has been scientifically proven, through the use of multiple studies, that stimulant medication works, I still did not understand how giving my child synthetic stimulants would help calm him down. Before I spoke to Michael’s psychiatrist about the mechanisms in the brain, the only thing my husband and I could picture was Michael after taking some type of stimulant as wild as a ball in a ping pong machine at an arcade. However, stimulant medication in those that have ADHD has a different effect. In those with ADHD, the brain needs extra stimulation in order to facilitate attention during tasks due to the *underarousal hypothesis* which suggests that hyperactive children don’t have the proper chemicals in their brain to arouse the inhibitory response system, making them impulsive (5). The hypothesis explains why Michael is constantly moving his feet or tapping his pencil. When stimulant medication is given, the brain has that extra stimulation necessary to arouse the inhibitory response system leading to a marked improvement in self control of movement and impulsive actions. My husband, being the skeptic he is wasn’t convinced. Dr. Meisenheimer, Michael’s psychiatrist, demonstrated his patience with us by drawing us a picture of the activity in the brain that I would love to share….

…. After reading up on various scientific journals, we called Dr. Meisenheimer to let him know of our choice. He reassured us that medication is so widely used because the benefits outweigh the risks associated. Multiple studies proved to both my husband and I that stimulant medication would be the best option for Michael and our family based on the fact that simply put, stimulant medication can be scientifically proven as more effective over other treatment options.

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