

Antipsychotics—risky drugs for little children

Despite the wealth of research on the benefits of treating ADHD with nutrition, drugs continue to be prescribed, and many children receive a cocktail of powerful chemicals that have not been shown to be safe or effective.

A new study published in January in the *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry* found that drugs designed for severe problems like schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and psychosis are being given to children, including toddlers, who do not have these conditions. What's more, these drugs can cause severe, irreversible side effects.

Dr. Paul Kurdyak and colleagues at the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences found that among the children who are being prescribed stimulant drugs for ADHD, nearly 12% of them are also taking an antipsychotic. This is based on the records of 10,000 patients in Ontario between the ages of 1 and 24.

The drugs are being used as tranquilizers to address disruptive behaviors, primarily in boys, even though they have never been approved for this use.



Antipsychotics include Risperdal, Zyprexa and Seroquel, with Risperdal being the most frequently used. In lawsuits brought against Janssen Pharmaceuticals (owned by Johnson & Johnson) on behalf of children who had been harmed by the drug, the company is accused of hiding data on the side effects of Risperdal, including extreme weight gain and gynecomastia, the development of breasts in boys.

In 2015, the American Medical Association's journal *Psychiatry* published the research from scientists at Yale, Columbia and the National Institutes of Mental Health. They examined 2.5 million prescriptions for antipsychotics between 2006 and 2010, and found that the drugs are widely used to address aggressive behavior in boys even though the children did not have psychotic symptoms.

Potential side effects of antipsychotics also include:

Weight gain of as much as 70 pounds, which increases the risk of diabetes and heart disease. Also:

- Osteoporosis
- Cardiac arrhythmias and risk of sudden death
- Development of psychosis after the drug has been removed
- Involuntary movement disorders, similar to those found in Parkinson's disease
- Reduction of the size of the brain

Many children also are given antidepressants, along with the other drugs — a practice called “poly-pharmacy.”



Irrational prescribing

Dr. Jill Littrell, a clinical psychologist, writes, “**The current combinations of drugs being used to treat children are totally irrational.** Stimulants increase the release of dopamine, while antipsychotics block dopamine receptors that will receive the dopamine or serotonin message. The purported mechanism of action of antidepressants is increasing the availability of serotonin, which will be countered by the action of the atypical antipsychotic, which block serotonin receptor. Again, it makes no sense to increase a neurotransmitter and then block its action.” She cites research showing that omega-3 essential fatty acids can reduce aggressive behavior in children.

Some of the children taking stimulants and antipsychotics are also being given antidepressants, which — paradoxically — increase the risk of suicide.

Is being young a disorder?

Yet another study has shown that a major factor for a child being diagnosed with ADHD is their age.

Dr. Martin Whitely and colleagues examined the data on over 300,000 students in Western Australia and found that the youngest children are twice as likely as their classmates to be given a label of ADHD and placed on drugs. The findings were published this year in the *Medical Journal of Australia*. This research confirms the results of similar studies carried out in the United States, Canada and Taiwan.