



[ABC Online](#)

The World Today - Research shows no long term benefit from ADHD medication

[This is the print version of story <http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2007/s2089497.htm>]

The World Today - Tuesday, 13 November , 2007 12:41:00

Reporter: Barbara Miller

ELEANOR HALL: Questions are again being raised today about the value of using drugs to treat attention deficit disorder. Research in the US suggests that medication has no beneficial effects on ADHD sufferers in the long-term. Indeed, the researchers warn that the medication can lead to stunted growth in a significant number of patients.

Barbara Miller has our report.

BARBARA MILLER: It was initially seen as a wonder drug but a number of studies have called into question the use of Ritalin and medication like it to treat ADHD. The latest is from the US.

Professor William Pelham from the State University of New York at Buffalo has been involved in a national study on ADHD treatment since the 1990s.

WILLIAM PELHAM: We published a report in 1999 that appeared to suggest that medication was the best way to treat children with ADHD. Other treatments were also good, that is a psychosocial approach, training parents and children and teachers how to work together, but medication appeared to be a bit better and we published that.

And then a year later did follow up, and two years later did another follow up, and that was just reported. And each time we did follow up, the effects of medication were less and less. And this last follow up, we can no longer detect any beneficial effects of medication.

BARBARA MILLER: The researchers also noted that continued use of medication, because it can lead to suppression of appetite, resulted in stunted growth in a significant proportion of patients.

Dr David Thomas is chairman of the Australian Medical Association's Child Youth Health Committee. He says the negative headlines about ADHD drugs that research like this can produce, shouldn't send out the wrong message.

DAVID THOMAS: This study needs to be carefully analysed, that looked at potential side effects, which is recognised. Medication has shown initial benefit and if there weren't continuing benefits, then that may be because other therapies were not in place to assist the children.

BARBARA MILLER: Sean Gaer is a 19-year-old TAFE student, who was diagnosed with ADHD 11 years ago. He says medication transformed his life.

SEAN GAER: I was very lethargic if I didn't take them and I would sleep for 20 hours a day. I would only be able to be awake for about four. I also couldn't see anyone because I couldn't get up.

BARBARA MILLER: But Sean Gaer says he felt he was becoming addicted to the drugs, and is now weaning himself off them.

SEAN GAER: I only take them for things when I go to TAFE and when I need to do tests. I don't take them for work anymore or anything. I'm feeling a lot better and I can control the tablet, now that it's actually me controlling it, not it controlling me. And when I take it on a one-off basis to go to TAFE it works well because it helps me concentrate and I don't feel the side effects from it.

BARBARA MILLER: The Australasian Royal College of Physicians is currently drawing up new guidelines on the treatment of ADHD. Gary Disher is the college's director of policy and communication. He says studies like this latest one from the US will be considered.

GARY DISHER: A lot of energy has gone into identifying all scientific papers, and with this new study that's come out, our review panel welcomes any new evidence that helps formulate the best possible guidelines.

BARBARA MILLER: The new guidelines will be submitted to National Health and Medical Research Council for testing next year.

Louise Newman, a Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Newcastle, says she hopes then the relatively high prescription rates of ADHD drugs in Australia will begin to go down.

LOUISE NEWMAN: We certainly have had an emphasis on medication and I think many people in the community, but also educationalists, psychologists and child psychiatrists, have been concerned that we've focused too much on a biological approach and have overlooked some of the psychological and other contributing factors to the disorder. So, we certainly would like to see a change in community and clinician attitudes.

ELEANOR HALL: And that's Louise Newman, Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Newcastle, ending that report by Barbara Miller.

Related Audio:

Full interview with Dr William Pelham on the dangers of ADHD drugs
Research in the US suggests that medication has no beneficial effects on ADHD sufferers in the long term. [RealMedia 28k+](#) [WinMedia 28k+](#) [MP3](#)

© 2007 Australian Broadcasting Corporation
Copyright information: <http://abc.net.au/common/copyrigh.htm>
Privacy information: <http://abc.net.au/privacy.htm>