

THE Daily Telegraph

ADHD drugs could stunt growth

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By Charles Miranda in London

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DRUGS used to treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) have no long term effectiveness and could stunt your child's growth.

And scientists have conceded that test results that prompted the parental craze to dole out the drugs to their kids, may have been exaggerated.

In what is sure to generate debate, BBC's Panorama program last night aired the results of an influential long-term monitoring program of 600 children across the US since the early 1990s.

The Multimodal Treatment Study of Children with ADHD study concluded that while drugs such as Ritalin and Concerta worked in the short term, there was no demonstrable improvement in children's behaviour after three years of medication.

In Australia, the use of the prescription drug has been treated by some as a panacea for disruptive behaviour by their children. The popularity of ADHD drugs all but doubled during the past few years and had caused medical authorities some concern.

Eight years ago, studies found one year of medication worked better than behavioural therapy in a finding that influences medical practice.

But the report's co-author from the University of Buffalo, Professor William Pelham, said he now believed the findings were overstated.

"I think that we exaggerated the beneficial impact of medication in the first study," he said yesterday. "We had thought that children medicated longer would have better outcomes. That didn't happen to be the case.

"The children had a substantial decrease in their rate of growth so they weren't growing as much as other kids both in terms of their height and in terms of their weight. And the second was that there were no beneficial effects - none.

"In the short run (medication) will help the child behave better, in the long run it won't. And that information should be made very clear to parents."

The influential BBC Panorama television program found last year the cost of ADHD drugs had cost the public health system in Britain more than \$AUD60 million.

The program aired disturbing footage of a 14-year-old Briton who had been on ADHD medication for a decade. His family kept a video diary of his behaviour; he recently assaulted three school teachers.

Dr Tim Kendall, of the Royal College of Psychiatrists said: "A generous understanding would be to say that doctors have reached the point where they don't know what else to offer.

"I hope that we will be able to make recommendations that will give people a comprehensive approach to treatment which will advise about what teachers might be able to do within the classroom when they're trying to deal with kids who have difficult problems of this kind."

Prof Pelham believes behavioural therapy such as concentration tests in the first instance and a simple diet of Omega-3 helped.

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