



Data Trends Update

May, 2000

Research on mental health services for children and adolescents and their families

Update on the White House Conference on Children's Mental Health, March 20, 2000

On March 20, 2000, National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) Director Steven E. Hyman, M.D., joined First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Donna Shalala, and other representatives of health care, public health, education, and parent organizations to discuss strategies to ensure the appropriate treatment of mental disorders in young children. Of particular concern was the prescription of Ritalin and other stimulants on children as young as two years of age. A study published February, 2000, in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* finds that the prescription of Ritalin in preschoolers soared 150% from 1991 to 1995, while the use of anti-depressants increased by more than 200%.

At the March 20 Conference, Hilary Clinton announced that the National Institute of Mental Health will dedicate more than \$5 million to research ADHD and Ritalin use in preschoolers. "This study will look at the gap between what we are finding out in the science labs and what is happening in clinical practice so we can ensure that our children get the care they need," Clinton said.

The National Institute of Mental Health also released a fact sheet to help parents of children with emotional and behavioral conditions understand their options, at the following website.
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/childmedmenu.cfm>

Furthermore, the Office of the Surgeon General will coordinate a national conference to occur this fall, on the treatment of children with behavioral and mental disorders.

A perusal of wire services reports indicate overwhelming support for the administration's plan to investigate and reduce the apparent over-prescription of Ritalin and other stimulants to pre-school children. Some reactions follow:

- Rep. Bob Schaffer introduced the next day (March 21) a nonbinding House resolution calling on the National Academy of Sciences to study the long-term effects of such drugs on young children. His resolution calls for congressional hearings on prescription drug use among children.
- The FDA will look at some common psychotropic drugs and begin a process to find out what dosage levels are appropriate for very young children. This information will then be included on the labels of these medications
- The American Academy of Family Physicians is sponsoring continuing education courses about these conditions for their 90,000 members.
- Dr. Allan Tasman, president of the American Psychiatric Association, blasted HMOs for encouraging doctors to prescribe the medications as a "quick fix."
- Ritalin manufacturer Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corp. issued a brief statement welcoming the study.
- Jerald Newberry, director for the health information program of the National Education Association, was pleased with the study as well.