



## Information for Healthcare Professionals on ADHD Medication and Adverse Effects

CADDRA expects many of you may be confronted by confused and scared parents worried about potential side effects of ADHD medications following a recent front page Toronto Star article (September 26, 2012): [“ADHD drugs suspected of hurting Canadian kids”](#).

The CADDRA Board is concerned this article and subsequent follow-up reports will unjustifiably distress and alarm families whose children are being treated for this disorder. The organization has sent a letter expressing this concern to the Star which you can see here:

[www.caddra.ca/cms4/pdfs/update/Response\\_Toronto\\_Star\\_Sept2012.pdf](http://www.caddra.ca/cms4/pdfs/update/Response_Toronto_Star_Sept2012.pdf)

CADDRA recommends healthcare professionals educate themselves on potential side effects and risks and communicate this information to families in the context of a balanced discussion on the risks and benefits of medication. The [CADDRA Guidelines](#) provides charts on published side effects on page 80; drug interactions on pages 82-83; contraindications or precautions on page 84; information on side effects management on page 72; cardiovascular risks on page 75; and specific information on medications on page 67. Any adverse medication reactions should be reported to the Health Canada through the [Canada Vigilance Program](#).

Information that may be useful when talking to patients and families:

- The 600 cases of adverse effects to medication over 10 years that were reported in the article lack sufficient information and background, such as the existence of comorbidities and other, pre-existing problems prior to medication, to allow for proper assessment of risk in the population. There is also no comparison between the numbers of cases of reported side effects over ten years and the numbers of children on ADHD medication.
- The rate of some of these side effects e.g. suicidality, is not evaluated against the background of what the rate of suicidality is in the general population of children of a comparable age. Without this knowledge of pre-existing conditions and symptoms, and the rates of such symptoms in the general population, we cannot conclude that these symptoms are related to the ADHD medication.
- The article does not balance the well-documented low risk associated with use of these medications, as shown in numerous clinical trials and studies over the last three decades, with the considerable risks related to not treating this disorder: depression, suicidality, anxiety, substance misuse, underachievement at school and impairments affecting all aspects of life, including family life, school, college and the workplace.
- All medications have side effects so awareness and careful monitoring is essential.

- The low risk associated with ADHD medications has been documented in numerous clinical trials and studies over the last three decades.
- ADHD is the most studied mental health disorder in childhood
- Medication is just one element of many strategies scientifically proven to help kids with ADHD.
- Not everyone who has ADHD will need medication.
- All treatment options are offered in the context of a broader treatment approach that includes education of the child and family and other strategies to address any social, emotional, behavioural and school problems a child may have.
- Early intervention can mean the difference between success and failure in school and the development of other comorbidities (e.g. anxiety, depression).
- Adderall XR/Vyvanse/Dexedrine and Dexetrine Spansules: Amphetamine has been available since 1938 and has a well-known safety and efficacy profile. Adderall: A focused review of sudden, unexplained deaths was carried out by Health Canada in 2006 and the medication's safety has been assured.
- Biphentin/Concerta/Ritalin: Methylphenidate-based (MPH). This substance has been available since the late 1960s and has a well-known safety and efficacy profile.
- Strattera: Rare reports of increase in suicidal ideation, clinicians need to carefully monitor this, especially in the early phases of treatment, not unlike with many antidepressant medications.
- Medication is prescribed using a "start low and go slow" approach.
- Parents should be aware of possible side effects associated with a medication their child is prescribed, and contact their physician if problems do occur
- A long-term doctor-patient relationship and regular monitoring is an essential part of treatment.
- The website of CADDAC, the Centre for ADHD Awareness Canada, at [www.caddac.ca](http://www.caddac.ca) has a lot of additional information on the disorder, treatment and strategies and provides support for parents, families, individuals with ADHD and teachers.