

**RE: NATIONAL POST ARTICLE JANUARY 31<sup>ST</sup>, 2012 – RITALIN GONE WRONG**

Few physicians and parents are aware of the “lack of effectiveness of ADHD drugs”, claims Dr. L Alan Sroufe in his misleading article: “Ritalin Goes Wrong”. In fact, it is Dr Sroufe who shows blatant disregard for years of peer-reviewed medical studies documenting the efficacy of ADHD medication.

His article ignores decades of genetic research that indicates ADHD is highly inheritable. It dismisses modern brain scan technology showing considerable difference in the brains of children, adolescents and adults with ADHD compared to the brains of individuals without ADHD. Like autism, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia, ADHD is a disorder of the brain. It is not caused, as suggested by Dr Sroufe, a University of Minnesota psychologist, by “experiences in early childhood”.

We, the Board of the Canadian ADHD Resource Alliance, agree that not everyone who is forgetful or very active has ADHD. There are comprehensive guidelines that assist healthcare professionals identify and treat individuals with the disorder. Medication is part of a multi modal treatment approach (along with psychosocial treatment and individual and family interventions).

Contrary to claims in “Ritalin Gone Wrong”, the stimulant medications used for treating ADHD are considered among the most effective medications in all of medicine. They have been in more or less continuous use since 1937. As clinicians practicing in the ADHD field for more than 25 years, we have seen firsthand that these medications are safe and effective over the long-term, with few side effects.

The decision to use medication must be an informed decision involving both parents and physicians. This article will unnecessarily worry parents who have made the decision to place their child on medication, add to the stigma erroneously associated with ADHD medication, and may make them feel like bad parents.

Dr Sroufe refers to the exhaustive study of the use of stimulant medication for ADHD, the Multimodal Treatment Study of Children with ADHD (MTA), funded by the National Institutes of Health in the United States. This is the largest and most comprehensive treatment study of ADHD that has ever been conducted and one of the seven international study sites was in Montreal. The study proved conclusively that stimulant medication, given on a regular basis and in a supervised setting, is very effective for treating the symptoms of ADHD.

The article chooses to focus on follow-ups to this study that were inconclusive but fails to explain this is largely due to poor compliance once children and adolescents left a vigorous study protocol. What is not said is that long-term randomized studies on the effects of ADHD medication are incredibly expensive and difficult to conduct; they are also unethical as they would involve children given a placebo for years for the purpose of a study.

When participants leave the controlled research environment created within a study, community follow-up is often poor. There are infrequent medication visits (one or two per year) with usually no input from the school to guide medication adjustment. This poor follow-up often results in patients discontinuing their medication either because of a lack of effect or side effects. Regular, standardized follow-up in the community is essential in order to improve the long-term outcome in patients with ADHD and to maintain the kind of treatment gains seen in the short-term with carefully monitored interventions.

In his article, Dr. Sroufe appears to be trying to make the point that inappropriate use of medication to deal with children’s behavioural problems or disadvantaged environments is wrong. CADDRA is in total agreement with him on this point but his scatter-gun approach, raising concerns about the diagnosis of ADHD and its appropriate treatment with stimulant medication as well as other modalities of treatment, is doing a great disservice to Canadians who suffer from this condition and the doctors, psychologists and mental health workers who struggle to assist them.

Yours respectfully,

**Lily Hechtman MD, FRCPC**, Professor, Psychiatry & Paediatrics, McGill University, Montreal, QC

**CADDRA Board**

**Canadian ADHD Resource Alliance**

*CADDRA is a Canadian, national, not-for-profit association. We are the voice of doctors who support patients with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and their families.*