

Dear Editor,

The article published on September 26, 2012 - "ADHD drugs suspected of hurting Canadian kids" - will unjustifiably distress and alarm the families whose children we treat for this disorder.

We, the Board of the Canadian ADHD Resource Alliance (CADDRA), agree information on potential side effects and risks related to ADHD medication must be adequately evaluated by Health Canada and communicated to families. However, the data reported in the article lacks sufficient background information, such as whether comorbidities and pre-existing problems were present prior to medication, to allow for proper assessment of risk in this vulnerable population.

Furthermore, 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.

The Canadian ADHD Practice Guidelines, first published by CADDRA six years ago, are designed to provide healthcare professionals with evidence-based and impartial information on assessment, diagnosis and treatment. Medication is one element of many strategies that are scientifically proven to help kids with ADHD. Not everyone who has ADHD will need medication. All treatment options should be offered in the context of a broader treatment approach that includes psychoeducation and other strategies to address any social, emotional, behavioural and academic problems a child may have. Access to adequate assessment and treatments for ADHD is still a struggle for many Canadians.

The Guidelines recommend medication should be prescribed conservatively, using a "start low and go slow" approach. A long-term doctor-patient relationship and regular follow-up monitoring is an essential part of treatment.

ADHD treatment should be an informed decision made by families based on a thorough and balanced discussion with a trained medical professional and not on sensational reporting that perpetrates the stigma associated with ADHD

Yours faithfully,

Dr Lily Hechtman, President of CADDRA
on behalf of the CADDRA Executive Board

The Canadian ADHD Resource Alliance (CADDRA) is the leading Canadian source of reliable, evidence-based ADHD information and expertise for healthcare practitioners. It increases awareness and promotes excellence in assessment and treatment through its internationally-renowned Canadian ADHD Practice Guidelines, training courses, new ADHD assessment toolkit for primary care practitioners, and an eLearning portal (online in November 2012).