

Australian College of Advanced Postgraduate Psychologists Inc.



July, 2014

Dear Mental Health Commissioners,

This recent report prepared by the Drug Utilisation Subcommittee (DUSC) of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee has just been released showing alarming trends of increased prescriptions of antipsychotic medications in children, some as young as 4 yrs old. The medications are being prescribed “off label” meaning they are being prescribed for mental health problems for which they have not been tested, such as anxiety and aggression in children. These drugs are normally prescribed for schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and extreme aggressive behaviour in children with autism, so how can this be allowed to happen.

The report stated that “between 2008 and 2011 there was a large increase in the use of Quetiapine, with the number of patients in the 0–19 year age group who were supplied the drug more than doubling (an increase of 138%). Risperidone use also increased in all age groups across this age category (+46%).” As stated in the study there are significant side effects from these powerful drugs. “Children and adolescents can gain a significant amount of weight after taking antipsychotics for a short period of time. Other adverse effects also include diabetes, metabolic syndrome, increased total cholesterol, incident hypertension, extrapyramidal symptoms and changes in hepatic transaminases and prolactin.”

Who is holding the GPs, paediatricians, psychiatrists and others accountable for the harm they are causing young children and adolescents? There is clear evidence that non-drug psychotherapy and family therapy options, especially when treated by properly trained mental health experts, such as Clinical and Counselling Psychologists, should be the FIRST line treatment of choice.

Please read this alarming report and help children and adolescents get proper care.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jillian Horton
Senior Clinical Psychologist
President of the Australian College of Advanced Postgraduate Psychologists (ACAPP)