

Australian College of Advanced Postgraduate Psychologists Inc.



July, 2014

Dear Mental Health Commission of WA,

Thank you for your reply in response to my correspondence regarding children and adolescents being prescribed “off-label” antipsychotic medications. I am pleased to hear that some debate and discussion may occur in the context of parliamentary debate over the Mental Health Bill 2013. This hopefully will lead to strict requirements and monitoring of such practices in the public mental health care system, however I do strongly believe that no child or adolescent should be prescribed “off-label” psychoactive medications when there is no database or trials indicating the safety of their use on the developing brain and body of a young person. When powerful medications are prescribed in this way, it essentially equates to the experimental use of drug therapy, and I would not wish my child or any child to receive experimental drug therapy in any circumstances.

Further, as noted in the report sent to you, “the most common prescriber of antipsychotics in children and adolescents are general practitioners, followed by paediatricians, then psychiatrists.” I wish to strongly highlight that when GPs prescribe these very powerful medications to children and adolescents they are not being monitored by CAMS nor by psychiatrists within the public mental health system, as the children and adolescents are being treated in the private health care system. This is a serious concern given that the average GP consultation is 7 minutes and they have very limited training in the assessment and treatment of psychological problems. This whole issue needs urgent attention.

It is also regularly reported by our members that many GPs prescribe psychoactive medications, to both adults and children, without having referred them firstly for psychological therapy with a Clinical or Counselling Psychologist. It is very concerning that medication is still clearly viewed as the first treatment response to mental health problems by many GPs. Fortunately there are also many GPs who are not as quick to prescribe psychoactive medications, but the prescribing styles and rates of psychoactive medication by GPs appears to be left to chance. With all the evidence about the effectiveness of non-drug psychological therapies, when provided by properly trained mental health professionals, there should be clearer guidance and demand for medications to be a “last resort” when assisting people with emotional problems.

Further, the theory that there is a biochemical imbalance in the brain which causes depression or anxiety based disorders is now so discredited, and is now viewed as an extremely unhelpful focus on the individual, rather than on their social/familial/work/financial environments, that the high level of medication use, according to the PBS, is actually alarming. We really need politicians and decision-makers to stand up for better evidence based care of people with emotional stresses.

What can you and other State based Mental Health Commissions, plus the Federal Mental Health Commission do?

Yours sincerely,

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