

## CHILDREN AND MEDICATION

**David Lowenstein, Ph.D.  
Psychologist**

- Of all the cultural markers of the past 10 years – Internet, Melrose Place, Gourmet Coffee Shops – none has made us feel better than PROZAC
- Prozac is the wonder drug for depression and a low risk prescription for depressed adults, difficulty with aging, the family dog's temper and now for Little Suzie who is feeling sad
- Peppermint flavored Prozac is about to make its debut by its manufacturer, Eli Lilly & Co. who just completed a big study showing Prozac's effectiveness with children.
- The concern by many in the medical community are that Prozac and its sister drugs (Zoloft, Paxil, Effexor and Serzone) might be overused just as Ritalin has been for hyperactivity.
- Prozac will make it easy to prescribe mellowing antidepressants to children who simply may be acting like children.
- Even though many drugs that are prescribed for adults have not been tested for children, medical ethics does not stop physicians from treating children with these drugs. In 1996 735,000 prescriptions were written for Prozac and its sister drugs for children ages 6-18. This was an 80% increase in the last 2 years.
- With stimulant drugs (Ritalin, Dexedrine) it has been found that 3 in 20 males between the ages of 5 and 14 are prescribed this drug. There have been incidents where a child is actually sent home from school with a note from the principal saying the child would not be allowed back unless Ritalin is prescribed.
- Critics have suggested that parents and teachers prefer to medicate difficult students rather than teach them the skills of concentration and manners. Others suggest that while the education system is increasingly underfunded and crumbling, inner cities produce children who are angry and alienated from society, society avoids the real causes of problems, and instead tries to patch the problem by medicating children who cause trouble.
- As a parent if you feel that your child is in need of psychiatric medication he/she would be evaluated by a qualified professional who spends an extensive amount of time in the evaluation of your child's difficulties and provides good follow up services to determine if the medication is appropriate and/or if the dosage needs to be reexamined. On many occasions the prescribing Physician or Psychiatrist should

refer you to a Psychologist, Social Worker or Counselor who can monitor the medication that your child is taking and provide you and the physician updates.

- Parents should be provided with complete information when psychiatric medication is recommended as part of your child's treatment plan. The following list of questions is suggested so that you will gain a better understanding of the psychiatric medication(s) your child is taking:
  1. What is the name of the medication? Is it known by other names?
  2. What is known about its helpfulness with other children who have a similar condition to my child?
  3. How will the medication help my child? How long before I see improvements? When will it work?
  4. What are the side effects which commonly occur with this medication?
  5. What are the rare or serious side effects, if any, which can occur?
  6. Is this medication addictive? Can this medication be abused?
  7. What is the recommended dosage? How often will the medication be taken?
  8. Are there any laboratory tests (heart tests, blood tests, etc.) which need to be done before my child begins taking the medication? Will any tests need to be done while my child is taking the medication?
  9. Who will be monitoring my child's response to the medication?
  10. Are there any other medications or foods, which my child should avoid while taking this medication?
  11. Are there any activities that my child should avoid while taking this medication?
  12. How long will my child need to take this medication? How will the decision be made to stop this medication?
  13. What do I do if a problem develops (child becomes ill, dosage missed, or side effects develop)?
  14. Does my child's school nurse need to be informed about this medication?