

HEALTH & WELLNESS

Take a Pill, Get an A

By Nicole Kiprilov

It used to be that studying, hard work, motivation, and effort would lead to academic success. For many, this idea no longer exists. Instead, parents are now urging kids to take powerful medication to help them earn A's and B's in school. Dr. Michael Anderson, a pediatrician for economically depressed families in Cherokee County, Atlanta, feels that the best way to treat attention disorders is to use powerful medicine pills, like Adderall. Adderall is an amphetamine that boosts focus and impulse control in kids who have A.D.H.D. (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder). Now, these pills are being prescribed to students who suffer from nothing more than a lack of motivation and focus. Basically, physicians are beginning to prescribe stimulants to students whose parents are economically underprivileged. These stimulants help students adapt to their learning environment. Dr. Anderson states, "We've decided as a society that it's too expensive to modify the kid's environment. So we have to modify the kid." Students have definitely been modified; studies show that students who take prescription drugs, such as Adderall, perform better on tests and are better able to absorb the information lectured in classes. Dr. Nancy Rapaport, a child psychiatrist in Cambridge, Massachusetts, states, "We are seeing this more and more. We are using a chemical straitjacket instead of doing things that are just as important to also do, sometimes more." But this whole idea of using prescription drugs to boost academic performance is certainly important and appealing to low-income families. Parents cannot afford to take their children to see fancy and expensive behavior therapists, tutors, and family counselors. Why go through all of that, when prescription meds are not only effective, but also cheap? Jacqueline Williams, a parent in Atlanta whose kids take prescription drugs, states that she cannot thank Dr. Anderson enough for diagnosing A.D.H.D. in her children. It seems as if it is now normal for parents to be content when their children are supposedly suffering from attention disorders. After all, Ms. Williams' children were suffering from a severe case of troublesome listening. Reported side effects of these drugs include growth suppression, increased blood pressure, addiction, and psychotic episodes. However, researchers are still not able to provide a full list of possible side effects, simply because these drugs have not been exposed to much experimentation. Dr. William Graf, an experienced child neurologist, states that students in elementary schools are still in the developmental phase, which means that these drugs could biologically affect a developing brain. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 9.5 percent of Americans ages 4 to 17 have A.D.H.D. The percentage of students who take Adderall is much higher. The reason for this is that even though physicians should not prescribe Adderall to young adults who do not have A.D.H.D., parents are still pushing for success and urging pediatricians to prescribe prescription meds to their kids. Just recently, the American Academy of Pediatrics published guidelines for physicians about making sure that children fit the criteria for A.D.H.D. Despite these guidelines, a 2010 study in the Journal of Attention Disorders stated that at least 20 percent of doctors do not follow these guidelines. Many of them feel that they are experienced enough to diagnose A.D.H.D. without performing certain tests. The most disturbing part of this phenomenon is that parents do not seem to realize the serious health problems that can result when students are given pills, of any sort, during their developmental years. Adderall is a harmful drug that is specifically reserved for individuals who suffer from A.D.H.D. Adderall is not a harmless substance because it has many side effects that can completely destroy an individual's well-being. It is upsetting that a reasonable person would prescribe Adderall to a child who has a mere problem of focusing in school, an issue that can most definitely be solved without the use of any medication. Yet, pediatricians, individuals who are smart and well-educated, have started a trend of prescribing medication to students who need a booster in motivation, attentiveness, and academic performance. Of course, pharmaceutical companies are experiencing a dramatic increase in profits and have resorted to off-labeling. Parents are completely responsible for this ordeal because they are brainwashing their children into thinking that this is the right thing to do. The kids seem to have the right instinct; most refuse to take the medication when it is prescribed, but parents have convinced their children that test scores are heavily influenced by medication use. This ridiculous idea is taking

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