



Troubled teens on powerful drugs

By Dana Blankenhorn | Oct 28, 2009 | 6 Comments

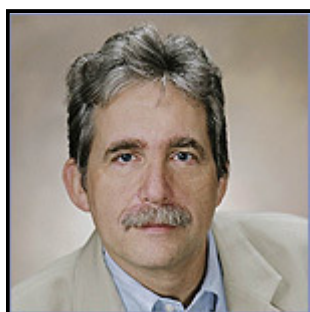
Has your teen's best friend just transformed from Taylor Swift to Rosie O'Donnell overnight?

She might just have ADHD.

A study published today in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* says second-generation anti-psychotics like Risperdal, Abilify, Zyprexa and Seroquel are being given to teens with common conditions like ADHD, leading to obesity in just 11 weeks.



The side-effects common to these drugs may be worse in kids and teens than adults, the study concludes.



If you detect a bias in this report, there is a barely submerged rage.

Some disclosure is called for.

My son, then 9, was given Risperdal in 2001, leading to several distressing side effects before his regular therapist took him off the stuff. It later turned out the head of Emory's Psychiatry Department, Charles Nemeroff (left) was taking what became \$2.8 million in drug pay-offs for pushing studies of this unapproved use.

Nemeroff later resigned under pressure from Congress and, while my son is fine, he doesn't completely trust me.

Can you blame him?

Now it turns out these drugs can cause teens to become obese in just 11 weeks, and acquire the high cholesterol numbers that accompany obesity. Kids and teens may be more prone to this weight gain than adults.

Lead author Dr. Christoph Correll told the *Associated Press* "we're a little bit between a rock and a hard place" when it comes to these drugs and side-effects, but the question occurs, are

we really? Are powerful psychoactives really a logical step to take for a kid with, say, Asperger's Syndrome? (Here, Albert, try some Zyprexa and you're sure to pass geography.)

Fact is drugs are not the total answer. Many adults, however, are getting good results with a combination of cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) and common ADHD medications.

Again, full disclosure. My son was in line to be part of an Emory study on CBT for ADHD in high school, while the disgraced department head was still on the job, but somehow it never came off and he was given standard talk therapy instead.

Now the kid doesn't trust the psychiatric profession either. I sympathize.

Drugs are not a cure for ADHD, Asperger's or anything else. They reduce symptoms and may help enable relief, when combined with high-quality therapy and supervised by a doctor who knows what they're doing and has no axe to grind.

But can you blame parents for distrusting the profession when this sort of thing happens?

I can't.

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Dana Blankenhorn has been a technology reporter since 1982, a business reporter since 1978, and a writer for as long as he can remember. His Schwab IRA has a few tech stocks in it, most notably some Intel and Applied Materials bought over 10 years ago. But the vast majority of his tiny fortune (emphasis on the word tiny) is invested in mutual funds. He presently writes for no one else but ZDNet, SmartPlanet and himself. But if you've got an opportunity let him know. If he takes the gig he'll first add it to this disclosure page. Rethinking Healthcare examines innovation in the health care industry covering topics such as electronic and personal health records, treatment, privacy, regulation and using information technology to manage and monitor chronic conditions.

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