

Indications for Medications

John Wermager, MD

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- First and foremost, accurate diagnosis is imperative for good treatment. It may also guide a person to go down the medication route sooner, depending on the diagnosis.
- Examples: psychosis, delirium, agitation
- ADHD sometimes is left untreated. If the symptoms are not problematic, there really isn't a need to treat.

- Many families are nervous about starting a medication for children, most commonly for fear of side effects or stigma.
- Luckily, there are many viable options prior to the initiation of medications
- Anxiety/Depression: Therapy, therapy, therapy!
- ADHD: Structure, behavior charts, modification of environment

- However, if these modalities do not bring about expected results, medications may play a role
- While there have not been as many research studies on psychiatric medications in children, we do have some demonstrating efficacy in depression (fluoxetine), ADHD (stimulants), anxiety (sertraline)
- Side effects do occur, but are generally time limited and rarely long-lasting.

Depression

- Many years ago, it was thought that depression could not afflict children as they had not developed enough emotionally to encounter significant hardship
- However, depression in children will appear somewhat different, often marked with irritability more so than withdrawal.
- Certain things may prompt the earlier initiation of medication. Positive familial response to an antidepressant may guide medication choices.

- Most commonly used are the SSRI class
- Some will start with bupropion (especially if there are inattentive symptoms or a lack of anxiety)
- Venlafaxine is somewhat lower on the list due to tolerability issues
- Electroconvulsive Therapy can be used, but this is infrequent.

Side Effects

- Nausea, vomiting, stomach upset
- Tremors
- Worsening anxiety
- Worsening mood
- Mild reduction in appetite
- Thoughts of suicide
- Decreased libido

ADHD

- Often, behavior charts can be used to remind about tasks and other things a child forgets.
- Modification of the classroom or other environment also may be beneficial (move to the front of the room).
- Realistic structure with scheduled activities
- “Wiggle breaks”

- The MTA study demonstrated that medications are superior to other treatment modalities in the case of straight-forward ADHD
- However, it is really quite rare to see just these symptoms without some comorbid anxiety, depression
- Medication Management has been around for a long period of time – the late 1930's and onward
- These medications can be broken down into three main classes

ADHD - Stimulants

- The most tested and proven treatment for ADHD.
- These work almost immediately and are out of the body relatively quickly.
- Side effects include weight loss, tics, tremors, hallucinations, increased blood pressure, increased pulse, cardiac complications
- May result in growth retardation
- May help prevent later substance use

ADHD – Alpha Agonists

- These look very much like blood pressure medications (some actually are).
- Are quite good for impulsivity, but not much benefit with inattention.
- May result in light-headedness, syncope, but most common side effect seen is sedation. This is often taken advantage of by dosing the medication at night

ADHD - Antidepressants

- Have the aforementioned antidepressant side-effects. Bupropion has not been demonstrated to actually help with ADHD symptom in children
- Take much longer to become effective (4-6 weeks)
- The possibility of liver damage/failure exists.

Anxiety

- May begin in childhood, more likely through adolescence and into adulthood.
- Often significant benefit can be obtained with behavioral therapies
- However, these symptoms may become so debilitating that medications are needed to allow a person to progress in therapy

Anxiety medication

- The most effective class has been the SSRI antidepressants. It is thought that serotonin plays a significant role in anxiety
- Vistaril may also be effective
- Usually the benzodiazepine class is not only ineffective, but sometimes results in a paradoxical reaction children find intolerable
- Diphenhydramine also may have a similar paradoxical reaction

Other Diagnosis

- Psychosis is really very rare in children. It is often a manifestation of mania. Psychosis, however, is a situation where medications should take a front and center role for the amelioration of symptoms.
- Mania in the context of bipolar disorder is also a situation where treatment would be started soon rather than later. Given the risk of what may happen in a manic/mixed state, let alone the discomfort of the symptoms, medication treatment is best started early.