

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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future. However, in order to allow for a significant decline in obesity rates, it is important for the government to take initiative and provide access to healthy foods. The American government should be supporting the American people, no matter what. Authorities should listen to the American people and observe their problems to really understand what sort of action to take. It should not be about money; it should be about the health and well-being of our people. I think that integrating information about obesity and related diseases into the public school curricula is a major step toward improvement. Young adults need to be aware of the negative effects of unhealthy eating. They need to understand the social as well as scientific aspect of unhealthy living. The more

information is shared and the more students are exposed to different examples, the greater the effect. It is extremely important for children to be able to tell the difference between living a healthy and unhealthy life style. It is also important for children to be able to choose, for themselves, the lifestyle that they want to live. There have been many laws that have implemented health programs at schools to educate students, but the problem is that these health programs are not enforced. Many schools are not treating this seriously, which is why the government needs to take some time and observe. Just recently, a program for schools called Fitness Integrated with Teaching (FIT) Kids Act, required the school to report on the quality of physical education provided. According to the Act, "Every elementary school child needs at least 150 minutes per week of physical educa-

tion, and middle and high school students need 225 minutes per week." It is programs like these that should be enforced by the government. The FIT program was heavily observed by Congress, and now it is effective. School administrators and parents need to understand that obesity rates are rising with each generation. Obesity can be a genetic problem, but every individual has an opportunity to fix that problem. Some individuals need to put in more effort than others, but it is a problem that has a solution. However, willpower and the effort of one individual alone will not make a difference, especially if our goal is to make a positive difference in society. Americans today need the support of the government and the support of each other in order to create a better future for themselves and their children. ■

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shape in the minds of parents all over the country. The Rocafort family in Georgia has four kids, all of which take Adderall and other prescription meds. One of the kids, Quintn, began taking Adderall five years ago, after having some trouble with attentiveness in school. When Quintn reached puberty, he started to exhibit violence toward other students because they were supposedly insulting his mother. The truth of the matter is that he was simply hallucinating. According to researchers, this is a rare but recog-

nized side effect of Adderall. Quintn became suicidal, and he was admitted into a psychiatric hospital. Despite all of this, Quintn's parents still insisted that Quintn take some sort of medication. Therefore, he switched to Risperdal. Quintn stated, "I took Adderall to help me focus on my school work, my homework, listening to Mom and Dad, and not doing what I used to do to my teachers, to make them mad." He described his week in the hospital and the effects of Risperdal: "If I don't take my medicine I'd be having attitudes. I'd be disrespecting my parents. I wouldn't be like this." Quintn's father stated,

"If they're feeling positive, happy, socializing more, and it's helping them, why wouldn't you? Why not?" The answer is because these medications are killing children. Students who take Adderall are at a high risk for drug addiction. This is completely logical, yet parents and doctors cannot seem to comprehend it. I think that there has to be a law that states that it is illegal for doctors to prescribe any sort of medication to individuals who do not have A.D.H.D. ■

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