

A Convenient Diagnosis

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When Joshua Lourie was seven, he started acting out in class. His school sent him for a psychological assessment and he was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Not unusual, as estimates say that between 3 to 7 per cent of Canada's more than seven million children are diagnosed with ADHD.



Joshua Lourie was diagnosed at age 7 for ADHD, but his family believes the real problem was diabetes.

Joshua's mother Janette says, "The school had suggested that I put him on Ritalin and this is when he was about the age of six, going on seven. They put a lot of pressure on me to take him to the doctor, get him on Ritalin." She refused, but that was not the end of it.



Janette at first refused to put her son on Ritalin, but that wasn't then end of the issue.

At 10, Joshua ended up being removed from her care and placed into a juvenile facility where he was given psychiatric medicines, not just ADHD medications but antidepressants, not approved by Health Canada for use in children under 18.

For the next 18 months he was bounced around from foster care to group homes, sometimes on as many as three different drugs at a time.

Joshua's grandfather, George Lourie, believes the reason for Joshua's problem behavior was not ADHD, but diabetes. Joshua's blood sugars were out of whack, and then he was prescribed Wellbutrin, a drug with potentially dangerous side-effects for diabetics and children. Joshua collapsed in a group home while he was on the drug.

Psychiatric diagnoses often lead to the prescription of medications, never tested in or approved for use by children. As children's bodies metabolize medication differently than adults, these off-label prescriptions can leave a child feeling, at best, like a zombie or at worst, lead to suicide.

Using data received from IMS Health Canada, an agency that tracks the use of prescription medications, W-FIVE discovered that in 2006, over one million prescriptions for ADHD medications, drugs like Ritalin, Adderall and Concerta, were written for children under the age of 18.

And there were over 300,000 prescriptions filled for antidepressants (SSRIs). Some people are increasingly worried about the sheer volume of these prescriptions.

Marty McKay, a psychologist who has treated and assessed children for over 30 years, believes that "Ninety per cent of children diagnosed as

ADHD are misdiagnosed and drugged for no appropriate reason." She points the finger of misdiagnosis at the school system and the psychiatric industry.

Teachers, she believes, are not qualified to make these diagnoses, but do so regularly. They are in fact being asked to assess children through the use of psychiatric rating scales in which they check off behaviors. Check off too many behaviours and it can lead to a child being diagnosed as ADHD. The next step is to refer a child for psychological assessment, which McKay says, generally just rubber-stamps a teacher's diagnosis.

Ask Joshua Lourie who should take the blame and he will tell you it's the doctors and the psychiatrists who prescribe all that medication.

Dr. Sandra Fisman of the Ontario Psychiatric Association, surprisingly, doesn't disagree with Joshua's point of view. She says, "There is a fashion around the diagnosis of ADHD." In blaming careless diagnosis, Fisman explains, "What we may be looking at is a core group who actually have the disorder and then a halo around that." She believes it is a problem that the "halo", those who do not have the disorder, are diagnosed and in many cases medicated.



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