Prescribing Trends of Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) Medications in UK Primary Care, 1995-2015.

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Abstract

AIM:
To describe the prescription of medications for Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in the UK between 1995 and 2015.

METHODS:
Using the Clinical Practice Research Datalink (CPRD), we defined a cohort of all patients aged 6 to 45 years, registered with a general practitioner between January 1995 and September 2015. All prescriptions of methylphenidate, dexamphetamine/lisdexamphetamine, and atomoxetine were identified and annual prescription rates of ADHD were estimated using Poisson regression.

RESULTS:
Within a cohort of 7,432,735 patients, we identified 698,148 prescriptions of ADHD medications during 41,171,528 person-years of follow-up. Usage was relatively low until the year 2000 during which the prescription rate was 42.7 (95% confidence interval (CI) 20.9 to 87.2) prescriptions per 10,000 persons, increasing to 394.4 (95% CI 296.7 to 524.2) in 2015, corresponding to an almost 800% increase (rate ratio 8.87; 95% CI 7.10 to 11.09). The increase was seen in all age groups and in both sexes but was steepest in boys aged 10 to 14 years. The prescription rate in males was almost 5 times that of females. Methylphenidate remained the most prescribed drug during the 20-year study period, representing 88.9% of all prescriptions in the 6-24 years old, and 63.5% of all prescriptions in adults (25-45 years old).

CONCLUSIONS:
Prescription rates of ADHD medications have increased dramatically in the past two decades. This may be due, at least in part, to both an increase in the number of patients diagnosed with ADHD over time and a higher percentage of those patients treated with medication.