ADHD in Germany: Trends in Diagnosis and Pharmacotherapy.

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Abstract

BACKGROUND:
Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) sometimes persists into adulthood. There have been no studies from Germany until the present time on the diagnosis and treatment of ADHD over the course of patients' lives, in particular during the transition from adolescence to early adulthood.

METHODS:
We used nationwide routine data of the AOK statutory health insurance fund to determine the frequency of ADHD diagnoses and prescriptions of medication for ADHD. We additionally analyzed the care of a transition cohort of initially 15-year-old ADHD patients over a period of six years.

RESULTS:
From 2009 to 2014, the prevalence of a diagnosis of ADHD rose from 5.0% to 6.1% in persons aged 0 to 17 years (with a maximum of 13.9% in 9-year-old boys) and from 0.2% to 0.4% in persons aged 18 to 69 years. The amount of ADHD medication prescribed to adults with ADHD increased over time, while the amount prescribed to children and adolescents fell. Methylphenidate was the most commonly prescribed drug, followed by atomoxetine and lisdexamfetamine. Only 31.2% of the patients in the transition cohort still carried the diagnosis of ADHD at the end of the six-year period, at age 21. The percentage of patients taking ADHD medication in this group fell from 51.8% at age 15 to 6.6% at age 21.

CONCLUSION:
The administrative prevalence of a diagnosis of ADHD among adults and the degree of medication use for ADHD by adults have risen in recent years. This can be interpreted as an indication of the sensitization of physicians and patients to the possibility of adult ADHD. Nonetheless, the prevalence of diagnosed ADHD remains less than the prevalence revealed by epidemiologic studies. This may indicate that adults with ADHD are currently underdiagnosed and undertreated. The low rate of use of ADHD medications among adolescents with ADHD who are on the verge of adulthood leads us to the question of whether specific transitional concepts need to be developed for this age group.