Medication-taking experiences in attention deficit hyperactivity disorder: a systematic review

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Family Practice, 2017
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/fampra/cmx088

Abstract

Background
Although attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a common condition for which pharmacotherapy is considered an effective treatment, guidelines on the treatment of ADHD have been challenging to implement. Considering the views of patients and caregivers involved in medication-taking could help shed light on these challenges.

Objective
This review combines the findings of individual studies of medication-taking experiences in ADHD in order to guide clinicians to effectively share decisions about treatment.

Methods
Five databases (MEDLINE, Embase, PsycINFO, SCOPUS and CINAHL) were systematically searched for relevant published research articles. Articles were assessed for quality using a Critical Appraisal Skills Programme checklist, and synthesis was performed using meta-ethnography.

Results
Thirty-one articles were included in the final synthesis, comprising studies of caregivers, paediatric patients and adult patients across seven countries. Findings were categorized into five different constructs, including coming to terms with ADHD, anticipated concerns about medication, experiences of the effects of medication, external influences and the development of self-management. The synthesis demonstrates that decisions surrounding medication-taking for ADHD evolve as the child patient enters adulthood and moves towards autonomy and self-management. In all parts of this journey, decisions are shaped by a series of ‘trade-offs’, where potential benefits and harms of medication are weighed up.

Conclusions
This review offers a comprehensive insight into medication-taking experiences in ADHD. By considering the shifting locus of decision-making over time and the need for individuals and families to reconcile a variety of external influences, primary care and mental health clinicians can engage in holistic conversations with their patients to share decisions effectively.