Diagnosis and Treatment of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder During Adolescence in the Primary Care Setting: A Concise Review.

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Abstract

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a chronic neurodevelopmental disorder with a worldwide prevalence of about 5% in school-age children. This review is intended to assist primary care providers (PCPs) in diagnosing and treating ADHD in adolescents. PubMed, PsychInfo, and Science Citation Index databases were searched from March 1990 to 2015 with the keywords: ADHD, primary care/pediatrics and children/adolescents, abstracts addressing diagnosis and/or treatment with 105 citations identified including supplementary treatment guidelines/books. Adolescent ADHD presents with significant disturbances in attention, academic performance, and family relationships with unique issues associated with this developmental period. Diagnostic challenges include the variable symptom presentation during adolescence, complex differential diagnosis, and limited training and time for PCPs to conduct thorough evaluations. The evidence base for treatments in adolescence in comparison to those in children or adults with ADHD is relatively weak. Providers should be cognizant of prevention, early identification, and treatment of conditions associated with ADHD that emerge during adolescence as substance use disorders. Adolescent ADHD management for the PCP is complex, requires further research, and perhaps new primary care psychiatric models, to assist in determining the optimal care for patients at this critical period.