Physician Perceptions of ADHD Stimulant Diversion and Misuse

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Journal of Attention Disorders (May, 2016)
doi: 10.1177/1087054716649664

Abstract

Objective:
The recent rise in ADHD has prompted concerns about adolescents with ADHD diverting and/or misusing stimulants. This is the first study to assess physician perceptions of the pervasiveness of these issues.

Method:
Questionnaires were mailed to a national sample of pediatric subspecialists. Responses were analyzed (n = 826; 18% response rate) using descriptive statistics and regression analyses.

Results:
In the past year, 59% of physicians suspected ≥1 patient(s) with ADHD diverted stimulants. Seventy-four percent believed ≥1 patient(s) feigned symptoms to obtain an initial ADHD diagnosis; 66% believed ≥1 patient(s) wanted stimulants to improve academic performance. Child and adolescent psychiatrists were most likely to suspect diversion and feigning symptoms. Thirty-nine percent of physicians believed diversion was at least “common.”

Conclusion:
Although many physicians suspected stimulant diversion and misuse, a substantial number were unaware of these issues, and subspecialist perceptions varied. These findings support the potential pervasiveness of these issues and the need for increased physician awareness.