Latest trends in ADHD drug prescribing patterns in children in the UK: prevalence, incidence and persistence

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Abstract

Objectives
To investigate attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) drug prescribing in children under 16 years old in the UK between 1992 and 2013.

Methods
All patients under 16 registered in the Clinical Practice Research Datalink (CPRD) with a minimum of 1 year of observation time and who received at least one prescription of any ADHD drug between 1 January 1992 and 31 December 2013. Trends in prevalence and incidence of use of ADHD drugs in children were calculated between 1995 and 2013 and persistence in new users was estimated.

Results
The prevalence of ADHD drug use in children under 16 increased 34-fold overall, rising from 1.5 95% CI (1.1 to 2.0) per 10 000 children in 1995 to 50.7 95% CI (49.2 to 52.1) per 10 000 children in 2008 then stabilising to 51.1 95% CI (49.7 to 52.6) per 10 000 children in 2013. The rate of new users increased eightfold reaching 10.2 95% CI (9.5 to 10.9) per 10 000 children in 2007 then decreasing to 9.1 95% CI (8.5 to 9.7) per 10 000 children in 2013. Although prevalence and incidence increased rather steeply after 1995, this trend seems to halt from 2008 onwards. We identified that 77%, 95% CI (76% to 78%) of children were still under treatment after 1 year and 60% 95% CI (59% to 61%) after 2 years.

Conclusions
There was a marked increase in ADHD drug use among children in the UK from 1992 until around 2008, with stable levels of use since then. UK children show relatively long persistence of treatment with ADHD medications compared to other countries.