

The Pushers

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"Well, now if I were the president of this land
You know, I'd declare total war on The Pusher man
I'd cut him if he stands, and I'd shoot him if he'd run
Yes I'd kill him with my Bible and my razor and my gun."

- From the song "The Pusher," lyrics and music by Hoyt Axton

A recent article released by the Associated Press¹ examined the soaring use of prescription drugs among children. The article was based in part on a study conducted by Medco Health Solutions,² a Franklin, New-Jersey based "pharmacy benefits manager."

The study's findings included:

- "Spending on prescription drugs rose 16.4% to \$142 billion last year" (This does not include spending on over-the-counter drugs.);
- "Spending on prescription drugs for those under 19 grew 28 percent last year";
- "Spending on prescription drugs to treat heartburn and other gastrointestinal disorders (in children) surged 660% over five years";
- "About 7 percent of children have asthma and 25 percent have allergies, approximately double the incidence 25 years ago";
- "Spending on antibiotics among children increased 42 percent"; and
- "Spending on drugs for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder increased 122 percent over the past four years."

Given these findings, and at the risk of preaching to the choir, I just have to ask some obvious questions:

1. If drugs are the solution for asthma and allergies, why has the incidence of these conditions doubled since MDs started using drugs to treat them?
2. Why has antibiotic use increased 42 percent during a time when MDs are supposed to be discouraging their misuse?
3. What is wrong with the public's concept of good nutrition that causes a 660 percent increase in heartburn and gastrointestinal drugs given to children over just five years? Are these drugs prescribed to counteract some of the milder adverse effects of drugs designed for adults that our children are taking?

4. Patients are now seeing advertisements for drugs, asking for the advertised drugs and getting prescriptions for the advertised drugs. At what point does the interaction with the medical doctor become irrelevant for those who believe that a drug is the solution to their health problem?
5. If drugs are really the solution, why do U.S. consumers need more of them every year? Are we addicted?

Back when I was in high school, we were always warned to stay away from the "pushers." These were the people who sold drugs just off the school grounds. They preyed on people who had various social and physical needs who could be convinced that the right drug could help them.

Today, we have corporate "pushers."

The scenario is essentially the same. They convince people that a pill can relieve their pain or change their lives. The corporate pushers aren't concerned about health. They just want you "feeling better."

No wonder we have a decades-old drug problem among young people - they learned by their parents' example. If a pill could solve their parents' problems, surely it could solve their problems.

Parents need to think twice before trying to address their children's health needs with a bottle of pills. Someone has to let them know that true health doesn't come from a pill.

Please, for the sake of the millions of children already regularly using prescription drugs, talk to your patients about their health and the dangers of drugs.

References

1. "Medication use soars among youths - Study: Prescription drug use rising faster in kids than seniors." Associated Press (<http://msnbc.com/news/809817.asp>).
2. MedcoHealth Solutions, formerly Merck-Medco Managed Care, describes itself as "the top pharmacy benefits management company in the U.S., serving 65 million members. The company, a subsidiary of Merck & Co., assists health plans in managing drug costs by negotiating rebates with pharmaceutical companies and processing claims."

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