<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/30/health/no-impact-found-for-stimulants-on-later-drug-abuse.html?ref=health>

Today’s piece is presented by Amy Harley, MD, MPH regarding a NY Times article, “No Link Seen Between Child Stimulant Use and Later Drug Abuse”.

The article highlights a recent meta-analysis of 15 ADHD longitudinal studies (not randomized controlled trials) on children, finding stimulant treatment for ADHD is not associated with later substance abuse.

Mr. Schwarz’s article draws attention to the absence of a protective effect of stimulant treatment on substance abuse in children diagnosed with ADHD, which is half of the researchers’ conclusion of the meta-analysis. The journalist emphasizes less that stimulant treatment was not associated with increased odds of substance abuse. This is also an important finding of the meta-analysis considering theoretical concerns that stimulants could biologically predispose children to later substance use. The news article provides background by identifying a 2003 analysis drawing an opposite conclusion, i.e. that stimulants protect against substance abuse in children with ADHD. The journalist hints that this previous finding has been used to justify expanded use of stimulants and may be partially responsible for their current prevalence. He juxtaposes the current finding of a lack of a protective effect of stimulant treatment with comments from a concerned addiction specialist regarding the potential pitfalls of widespread availability of stimulants. This specialist appears to be without any discoverable peer-reviewed publications and has no identified academic, governmental, non-partisan advocacy or other identified affiliation, and whose professional opinion is validated on her practice’s website solely via testimonials.

Helpfully, Mr. Schwarz acknowledges, as did meta-analysis authors, that the presence of no overall effect of stimulant treatment on substance use disorders may be due to balancing positive and negative effects in subgroups of children with ADHD. It may also have been useful to mention the general principle of the increased potential for confounding and bias in studies conducted in uncontrolled, non-randomized fashion.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ADHD webpage: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd/>

A national non-profit organization Children and Adults with ADHD: <http://www.chadd.org/>