

Health

Bush-backed drug marketing schemes

By Evelyn Pringle

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April 25, 2005—At an FDA hearing on the safety of psychotropic drugs on Feb 2, dozens of despondent parents testified that their children had committed suicide or other violent acts after being prescribed the same drugs that are being marketed in the Bush-backed pharmaceutical industry schemes aimed at recruiting the nations 52 million school children as customers.

In July 2003, the Bush appointed New Freedoms Commission on Mental Health (NFC) recommended screening all children for mental illness and designated TeenScreen as a model program to ensure that every student receives a mental health check-up before finishing high school.

The NFC also has a preferred drug program in place, modeled after the Texas Medication Algorithm Project (TMAP), that lists what drugs are to be used on children found to be mentally ill.

The list contains every drug that people complained about at the FDA hearing, including Paxil, Zoloft, Celexa, Wellbutron, Zyban, Remeron, Serzone, Effexor, Buspar, Risperdal, Zyprexa, Seroqual, Geodone, Depakote, Adderall, and Prozac.

There is little, if any, evidence that these drugs work on children but, nevertheless, an estimated 10 million children in the US are now taking these mind-altering drugs even though they have documented side-effects, including suicidal ideation, mania, psychosis, and future drug dependence.

According to a May 2003 report in The New York Times, national sales of anti-psychotics reached \$6.4 billion in 2002, making them the fourth highest-selling class of drugs, which proves the drug companies are already making a killing by drugging our kids.

Experts Against Screening

Dr. Jane Orient is an internist and executive director of the Association of American Physicians and Surgeons. She offered a few words to the wise in United Press International's "Outside View" on December 16, 2004.

In regard to TeenScreen, Orient says parents ought to be asking some very serious questions before the government experts interview the first child, such as:

What are the credentials of the screeners? What are the criteria for possible abnormality? What is the scientific validation? Will you be allowed to get a second opinion? Can you see the record and enter corrections if indicated? Will the record at any point be destroyed, or will the stigma of a diagnosis such as "personality disorder" follow the child throughout life?

What will happen if your child fails the screen? What sort of treatment will be given? Who will supervise it? What if you don't approve of it?

Do drug companies expect to have a large number of new consumers of their psychoactive drugs? Who might profit from the program (perhaps discoverable by asking who lobbied for it)?

Bingo, right question, doctor. Who stands to profit?

In 2003, Medico Health Solutions reports that the use of behavioral drugs for children topped all other types of drugs at 17 percent of total spending. In the year 2003, market research firm IMS Health calculated worldwide sales of antidepressants at \$19.5 billion, up 10 percent from the year 2002.

Phyllis Schlafly, author of *No Child Left Unmedicated*, raises several valid questions. What are the rights of youth and parents to refuse or opt out of such screening? Will they face threats of removal from school, if they refuse privacy-invading interrogations or medications? How will a child remove a stigmatizing label from his records?

Psychiatrist Peter Breggin, a court-qualified medical expert, and author of books, *Talking Back to Prozac* and *The Anti-Depressant Fact Book*, warns about the life-long damage a label of mental illness can cause.

"There is nothing worse that you can do to a human being in America today than give them a mental illness kind of label and tell them they need drugs, and these children are 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 years-old being treated in this manner," Breggin reports. "I then see them coming to me as adults saying I'd like to be a doctor but how can I when I have crossed wires in my head."

In a report, Allen Jones, former investigator Penn Office of Inspector General Bureau of Special Investigations, points out that there has been a 500 percent increase in children being prescribed drugs during the past six years.

Jones says the NFC call for mandatory screening of all students, with follow-up treatment as required, translates into putting more kids on mind-altering and potentially lethal drugs.

"TeenScreen is purely and simply a marketing scam to sell psychotropic drugs," according anti-child drugging advocate Ken Kramer, "When they use 'even if we save one life' as an argument to arouse emotions in parents that truly care, they are lying," he warns.

Bush Promotes Dangerous Drugs

The truth is, with full support from Bush, the pharmaceutical industry is using TeenScreen as a vehicle to push dangerous drugs on children who in the eyes of many experts are already being overmedicated.

Despite the fact that SSRI antidepressants are banned for use in children in the UK and despite the FDA "black box" warning label now required on all SSRIs that the drugs increase suicidal thinking and behavior in kids, the NFC not only recommends that the same drugs be prescribed to children, it promotes the very schemes that will increase the number of kids on these drugs in schools and other public institutions.

According to a report by the Florida Statewide Advocacy Council, posted on Ken Kramer's website records@psychsearch.net, an investigation in Florida found that of 1,180 kids in foster care, 652 were on one or more psychotropic drugs.

In Texas, Dr. John Breeding, an Austin psychologist, has seen cases where some foster children were placed on as many as 17 drugs and says drugs are being used as chemical restraints in Texas. He wants all SSRIs and neuroleptic drugs banned from use on children "The SSRIs are extremely harmful and addictive; and can cause or exacerbate suicidal or homicidal tendencies; withdrawal is painful and dangerous," Breeding warns.

Dr. Ann Blake Tracy, the director of the International Coalition for Drug Awareness, holds a doctorate in biological psychology, and is a specialist in the adverse reactions to SSRI medications. Tracy claims the

whole hypothesis of SSRIs is "backwards." She says the drugs increase serotonin while decreasing the metabolism of serotonin, especially in the 7 to 10 percent of the population that studies have shown don't have the proper enzyme to metabolize SSRIs in the first place, according to the Aug 22, 2004 Desert Morning News.

Dr. Tracy can recite hundreds of horror stories involving violence by people taking the same drugs that TeenScreen is marketing to more children.

She told the Morning News about, "the professor on Prozac who bit her mother to death; the Stanford graduate on Paxil who stabbed herself in the kitchen while her parents slept; the mother who bludgeoned her son and then drank a can of Drano; and the 12-year-old girl who strangled herself with a bungee cord she attached to a plant hanger on the wall."

"Most of these drugs are not approved for children, but it doesn't stop doctors from prescribing them," Tracy points out.

Turning People Into Psychotic Murderers

Besides causing suicide, enough evidence now exists to prove that psychotropic drugs have played a major role in the senseless acts of violence by school-age children in this country in recent years.

Dr. Breggin, is against the use of psychotropic drugs in children, and has testified in civil and criminal cases numerous times about the link between SSRIs and suicide and other acts of violence.

On April 15, 2001, 16-year-old Cory Baadsgaard took a rifle to his high school in Washington State and held 23 classmates and a teacher hostage. Cory sat in jail for 14 months before finally being released, based on expert testimony by psychiatrists that his behavior was an adverse reaction to the drugs he was prescribed.

Cory has no memory of his actions at the school that day. Twenty-one days before the event, he had been taken off Paxil and prescribed a high dose of the drug Effexor.

Cory's father, Jay, told Insight News, "They always talk about how the kids who do these things are the ones who get picked on by the jocks and stuff, but Cory was a jock. He was on the varsity basketball team, played football and golf, and was very popular in school.

Jay wants the media to warn people about the dangers of putting kids on these drugs, "If Cory had been on PCP the media would say 'Oh, he needs drug rehabilitation,' but because these were prescribed medications they say 'Oh, it can't be that,' but now we know it can be," he said.

"The morning that Cory went to school and did what he did, my wife and I just knew that it had to be something with the drugs," Jay reports. One of Cory's friends described the incident to Jay, "Cory was yelling and then he just stopped, looked down and saw the gun in his hand and woke up," he said.

Cory recently made an unlikely new friend in Colorado, when he met Columbine High School shooting victim, Mark Taylor, who is suing the manufacturer of the antidepressant that Eric Harris was on when he opened fire at Columbine.

Kelly Patricia O'Meara interviewed Mark Taylor, and recounted his description of the shooting incident in a report for Insight on Sept 2, 2002.

Taylor told Kelly, "I was sitting on a hill outside the school eating lunch with my best friend when Eric Harris came over and started shooting me." Taylor recalled, "I was shot between seven and 13 times. No one really knows the exact number because there were so many bullet tracks. Most of the bullets just went right through me. After I was shot I just lay there, playing dead, and could see others being shot."

It has never been revealed if Dylan Klebold was on any legal drugs at the time of the shootings, but an autopsy revealed that Harris was on the psychotropic drug Luvox, a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI).

Taylor's attitude toward the teen who nearly killed him is surprising. He told O'Meara, "I'm suing Solvay because I believe that Eric Harris did what he did because of this drug."

Taylor's suit claims the drug made Harris manic and psychotic and, as a consultant in the suit, Dr. Tracy agrees. "All you have to do is read the Luvox package insert to see that Eric's actions were due to an adverse reaction to this drug," she told Insight News, "Show me a drug anywhere that has listed mania and psychosis as frequent adverse reactions. That is what the insert says for Luvox. There is no doubt in my mind that Luvox caused Eric Harris to commit these acts," she explained.

Gary Null & Associates of New York is filming a documentary called "The Drugging of Our Children," that will feature interviews with both Cory Baadsgaard and Mark Taylor, and will chronicle the long history of tragic events that have resulted from the use of these drugs on children.

A little known fact is that a few days before the Columbine tragedy, Eric Harris had been rejected by the Marine Corps, specifically because he was taking the drug Luvox.

In 2001, 18-year-old Jason Hoffman, shot five students and teachers at a California high school, while on the drugs Celexa and Effexor, and he too was rejected by the Navy one day before he went on his rampage, according to the San Diego Union-Tribune.

In a letter to his mother, Hoffman said, "I want people to know that what happened was not the real me, I was just angry, maybe my medication. It was a fluke of the moment. The person was not the true Jason Hoffman," he wrote.

On Oct 29, 2001, Jason Hoffman killed himself by hanging from a vent screen in his jail cell, the Tribune reported.

Kip Kinkel was 15 on May 21, 1998, when he murdered his parents, and then went to Thurston High School in Springfield, Oregon, where he shot and killed two students and injured 22 more. Kinkel was on Ritalin and Prozac at the time of the killings, even though Prozac was not approved for pediatric use.

Seven years after the senseless killings by Kinkel, on December 18, 2003, Eli Lilly sent letters to British healthcare providers, warning that Prozac was not recommended for any use in children.

Fourteen-year-old Elizabeth Bush was on antidepressants when she took a gun to school and wounded another student in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, in 2001.

Twelve-year-old Christopher Pittman was on Zoloft when he shot his grandparents and set their house on fire, and says his violence was caused by the drug. Before Zoloft, he had been on Paxil.

According to court records, the doctor who prescribed the drug to Christopher mentioned no problems in his medical notes. A few days before the murders, the doctor wrote: "Lots of energy. No plans to harm self. Not flying off the handle."

Christopher now sits in prison.

His father, Joe Pittman, testified about the effects of the drugs on his son at the FDA Hearing and read a letter Christopher wrote that described how he felt when he committed the murders, "Through the whole thing, it was like watching your favorite TV show," he wrote. "You know what is going to happen but you can't do anything to stop it."

Dr. Tracy explains how this happens. SSRIs suppress "the REM state or dream state [of sleep] . . . These drugs allow a person to be awake but at any time they can slip into the REM state. This is why people often discuss how they couldn't tell the difference between the dream and reality. These drugs are horribly damaging to the entire system," she warns.

Even the people closest to Jeff Weise are at a loss to say what led to the deadly killing spree by Weise in Minnesota, where the 16-year-old shot his grandfather, his companion, and then went to the high school and shot five students, a teacher and a security guard before killing himself. According to school employee, Gayle Downwind, Weise was on Prozac at the time of the shootings.

Dr. Tracy has consulted on many cases where children engaged in violent behavior including a 15-year-old boy on Zoloft who shot and killed a woman and is serving life in prison; a 17-year-old boy on Paxil for three months who jumped off an overpass into the path of a trailer truck; a 14-year-old girl prescribed Paxil to deal with the suicide of her father (who was on Paxil before killing himself) drank Drano in a suicide attempt; and a 16-year-old boy on Paxil who stabbed a woman over 60 times, drove his car into a cement abutment in a failed suicide attempt, and is now serving life in prison.

"In each of these cases," Tracy told Insight News, "individuals close to them were shocked at the violent and destructive behavior because it was so out of character for them."

Courts Starting to Get It

Drug companies are finally starting to be held responsible for violent behavior associated with these drugs. A jury in Cheyenne, Wyoming, recently determined that Paxil "can cause some individuals to commit suicide and/or homicide." The jury decided Paxil caused Donald Schell to shoot his wife, daughter and granddaughter before killing himself after being on the drug only two days.

The jury allocated 80 percent of the fault to Paxil drugmaker GlaxoSmithKline and awarded the surviving family members \$8 million in damages.

On June 18, 2003, GlaxSmithKline issued a warning to British physicians against the use of Paxil in children, acknowledging failure of clinical trials "to demonstrate efficacy in major depressive disorders and doubling the rate of reported adverse events—including suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts—compared to placebo."

In Bismarck, North Dakota, 10 days after Ryan Ehlis began taking Adderall, he shot and killed his 5-week-old baby and then turned the gun on himself. He survived and was tried for the murder but was acquitted after the judge agreed with psychiatrists who testified that the murder resulted solely from a psychotic state caused by the drug.

In February 2005, Canadian regulators ordered Adderall off the market after the drug was linked to 20 sudden deaths and a dozen strokes. Of the 20 deaths, 14 were children.

There has been a lot written about the increase in teen violence and school shootings, but no one has identified a common denominator in the lives of these kids with one exception, the drugs. If we allow the Bush-backed marketing schemes to succeed in recruiting more kids as customers for these dangerous drugs, according to Tracy, we had better prepare for more of the same.

"We've got a nightmare on our hands with these drugs, an absolute nightmare," she warns, "We've got kids on these drugs that are ticking time bombs in every school in America."

"When all of this is over and we count up the dead, we're going to be in shock," she adds.

Evelyn Pringle is an investigative journalist focused on exposing government corruption.

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