



The Royal Australasian  
College of Physicians

**Paediatrics & Child Health Division**

**Statement 20/12/06**

## **Good news in ADHD: Important changes to the management of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder**

Welcome changes have been recently introduced for the treatment of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in children and adolescents. In Nov 2006 Medicare rebates for counselling sessions for children became available, and last week it was recommended that Concerta, a long-acting stimulant, and Strattera, a non-stimulant be listed as subsidised medications. These initiatives will bring improvements to the treatments that can be offered to children and adolescents with ADHD.

### **Background:**

- Genes and the environment both have a role in the development of ADHD.
- The impact of ADHD can be reduced through sound parenting, good nutrition, adequate sleep, and a supportive school setting.
- Research has consistently found that medications reduce the symptoms of ADHD, enabling improved learning and social functioning.
- Around 1-2% of children in Australia take medications for ADHD. (ADHD affects around 3-5% of children).
- In most states only paediatricians and psychiatrists can prescribe stimulant medications for ADHD. Prescribers need to apply for a permit from the government to prescribe these medications.
- Through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS), the Australian government subsidises the short-acting stimulant medications Ritalin and dexamphetamine. These last only 3-4 hours, so children usually need to take a dose at school around lunchtime.
- Many children with ADHD have associated problems such as learning difficulties, coordination problems, defiant behaviour, anxiety, and depression. These problems can be as important as the ADHD itself, and need to be addressed alongside the ADHD.

### **Improved access to long-acting medication for ADHD:**

- Longer-acting preparations of stimulant medication, which last between 6 and 12 hours, are now available in Australia. Children are given a dose in the morning, and do not need to take a dose at school.
- The Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC) has given a positive recommendation to the government regarding adding one of these, Concerta, to the PBS list. At present Concerta cost families between \$100 and \$150 for a month's supply. If listed on the PBS it would cost the same as other subsidized medications, around \$25 (or \$5 for Health Care Card holders).
- The PBAC has also given a positive recommendation for another ADHD medication, Strattera (atomoxetine). Strattera is a non-stimulant which has been shown to be helpful in reducing ADHD symptoms. It may suit some children better than the stimulants. Strattera currently costs around \$150/month.



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- The listing of these two medications for ADHD would be a positive move and would provide families with affordable choices of medication. This would enable doctors to tailor treatment to best suit the patient.

**Easier access to counselling for ADHD:**

- Access to psychology services with improved parental understanding and management of children with ADHD can be an important part of the multidisciplinary approach to the management of ADHD.
- On November 1 the federal government announced that 6-12 sessions /year of psychology therapy for children could be rebated under Medicare. This is good news to help children with a range of mental health problems, including ADHD. Until now, access to psychology services has been difficult for many families of children with mental health problems.

For information on medical management and medication safety please refer to the previous statement from the RACP released in July 2006 *Medication Management for ADHD: a brief guide for parents and non health professionals*.