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REVIEW OF STUDIES OF ADHD: LONG-TERM OUTCOMES WITH AND WITHOUT TREATMENT

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Introduction: As awareness of ADHD has increased worldwide, interest has grown beyond the constellation of ADHD symptoms, to include long-term impact on people's lives and society in general.

Objectives: Examine the results of studies of long-term life consequences of ADHD.

Aims: To identify areas of life affected long-term by ADHD and differences in outcomes with and without ADHD treatment.

Methods: Following Cochrane guidelines, 12 databases were searched for studies published in English (1980-2010). Limiting criteria maximized study inclusion while maintaining high study rigor: (1) peer-reviewed, (2) primary study reports, (3) including a comparator condition, and (4) reporting long-term outcomes (mean 8 years, range 6 months-40 years from study start for prospective studies; subjects in adolescence or adulthood for retrospective or cross-sectional studies). The fully-defined electronic search yielded 4615 citations. Manual review based on titles and abstracts yielded 340 studies included in this analysis of outcomes.

Results: The majority of studies (86%, 243 of 281; studies of untreated ADHD only) showed that untreated ADHD has substantial negative long-term outcomes, encompassing nine broad-ranging areas of life: non-medicinal drug use/addictive behaviour, antisocial behaviour, academic achievement, occupational achievement, public services use, self-esteem, social function, obesity, and driving outcomes. In contrast, most studies including ADHD pharmacotherapy and/or non-pharmacotherapy (94%, 46 of 49) showed that compared with baseline or untreated ADHD, long-term outcomes improved or stabilized with treatment of ADHD.

Conclusions: ADHD has notable negative long-term consequences, and this negative impact may be reduced with treatment of ADHD. Supported by Shire Development Inc.