ADHD#4 - Pharmaceutical Corporations

Lincoln Stoller, PhD., 2012

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... a little review

My analysis of Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) takes a broad view. The first installments in this series consider the major institutions, starting with Doctors. We'll now consider pharmaceutical companies. After this we'll consider Schools, and then Parents, before we move to the issues of treatments and causes.

I follow a transparent, rational approach, as opposed to a view that supports market forces and authoritarian dictates. I conclude ADHD is a designation of behavior assigned to people having a variety of difficulties. Defining these issues as a single disorder furthers corporate, government, and professional interests at the expense of individual health and well-being.

- ADHD is not a medical diagnosis, though it incorporates biological and psychological elements.
- ADHD is not a cognitive dysfunction, although people who are assigned the label struggle with cognitive differences.
- ADHD is not an educational disability, though institutions punish those exhibiting the behavior.
- Less than 30% of those labeled ADHD are biologically different.
- Once you eliminate a constellation of related social, personal health, family and educational issues it's likely that the ADHD label has no useful medical purpose.

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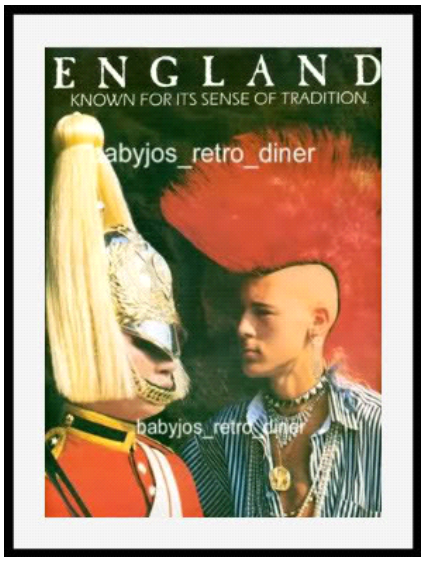
ADHD should be thought of as a catch-all term for the dis-regulation that exists between some individuals and their environment. This is entirely different from a disease or a dysfunction because it exists only as an interaction between a person and the environment. This definition applies to at least 80% of those assigned the ADHD label.

Recognizing this difference will help you in understanding the analysis presented here.



Big Pharma's Minions

I have little objection in theory to the role of Big Pharma: they research new medicine and produce products to maximize their profit. They are not concerned with people's health or social good. They are chemical companies.

Big Pharma deserves our condemnation to the extent that they undermine society by buying off public servants, bribing professionals, and disseminating false information. All mega-corporations behave in this fashion, and we all know this.

What is there left to say about Big Pharma's role in ADHD? Not much, really. It's sufficient to review the magnitude of their investment in and profit from ADHD medication, and to note the nature of their bribes and propaganda.

Big Pharma warps the minds and policies of those we've come to trust. You might think of this as a kind of conspiracy, but it's not the normal kind in which conspirators are plotting together—it's more of a manipulation.

Big Pharma makes pawns out of doctors, professors, medical journals, researchers, universities, hospitals, public health officials, psychologists and regular people whose income depends on corporate profits. These people are generally unaware of the system-wide economic structures that invade their lives and control their attitudes.

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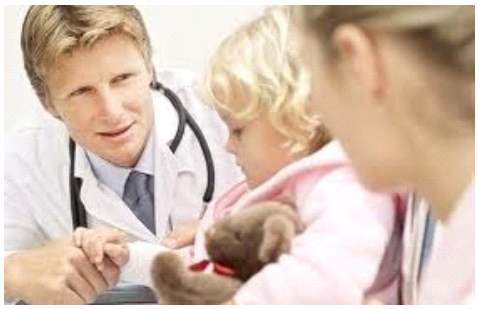
I do not condemn the Mass Media for delivering Big Pharma's message because that is what the Mass Media do. Advertising is advertising. It's the people who work for Big Pharma without knowing it, and who misrepresent themselves as independent agents working for the social good, who deserve scrutiny and condemnation.

This group includes such pillars of society as the school principal who supports the use of Ritalin because it fosters harmonious relations between students and teachers, and so furthers their notion of "a good education".

Rarely will they admit that this notion of education derives from turn-of-the-century, corporate-instigated social programs designed to produce workers and followers, not thinkers and leaders. We'll speak of this further when we consider the role of education in the diagnosis of ADHD.

"But this is the system we live in!" the administrator will object, and this is exactly the point. As an actor in the system, you are responsible for all that you do and all that others use you to accomplish.



Similarly, General Practitioners who overlook their own lack of training in psychological issues, lack of time to pursue a complete diagnosis, and lack of equipment to perform discriminating tests in order to issue an ADHD diagnosis -- one that fails to meet minimal diagnostic criteria and, as we'll see, masks the real issues 80% of the time -- accept a role as an agent in a network of for-profit industries while retaining the guise of an authority on personal welfare.

With authority comes responsibility, and this insight is what most professionals unwittingly lack or are denied by the dictates of their profession.

Few healthcare professionals involved in the diagnosis and treatment of ADHD understand the role they are playing, the interests they are serving, and the programs in which they are complicit.

The Engines of Mordor

There is no point in demonizing Big Pharma. It should not be necessary, as demonic aspects are part of their nature. Their actions serve a purpose, some laudable and some not. Nevertheless, it's fun to consider pharmaceutical companies from a negative point of view. Let's punch the Leviathan in the

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nose!

Here are some of the bright ideas thought up and carried out by the marketing departments of major pharmaceutical companies.

- Corruption of science by suppressing damaging research results, having positive results exaggerated by company ghostwriters, and engaging ghost-authors who lend their names to research in which they're not involved.

- Subsidizing not-for-profit organizations that advocate the use of pharmaceuticals. These include *The National Alliance for the Mentally Ill*, and *Children and Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder*.

- Fostering patronage and conflicts of interest through "revolving door" hiring policies targeted at public officials. These hiring policies have existed for years between the Food and Drug Administration and the drug companies. (See "Ron Paul condemns close ties between FDA and Big Pharma.")

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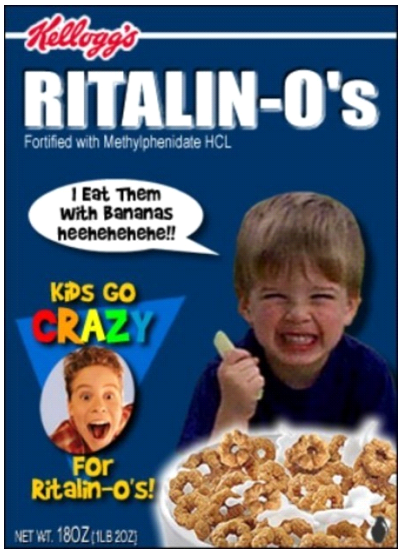

- Between 30% and 50% of the American Psychological Association's income is derived from conference fees and advertising paid by the pharmaceutical industry. The APA itself said that "Corporate funding – particularly from pharmaceutical companies – ... could pose a threat to the integrity of psychological research and practice."

- In 2004, over 25% of all doctors in the United States received drug company money for helping to market drugs.

- 90% of the authors of three major psychiatric clinical practice guides had undisclosed financial ties to companies that manufacture drugs recommended as therapies in these guides.

Why does this go on? Why isn't anything done about it?

Both questions have simple answers, but we first have to look at the corporate balance sheet.

EXPENSES
It is estimated to cost between $400 million to $2 billion dollars to develop and bring a new drug to market.

REVENUE
Global sales of the ADHD drugs Ritalin, Adderal, Concertal and similar generics were estimated to be $2.8 billion in 2003. 2012 sales are estimated at over $3.6 billion.

PROFIT
Nearly all of the $4,000,000,000 (4 billion) in annual revenue is now profit as development is finished and the cost to produce these drugs is low. The company that sells the most drugs makes the most profit, but all manufacturers profit if sales grow.

What counter-balancing economic, institutional, or political forces advocate alternatives to pharmaceuticals in the treatment of ADHD? Aside from the disparate voices of parents, therapists, and counselors who apply other therapies, there is none.

Successful pharmaceuticals are cash cows. They remain cash cows as long as manufacturers exonerate their products from negative claims, fund organizations to encourage their use, sponsor conferences and educational programs that extol their benefits, build legal precedents against victims injured by them, contribute to the elections of supportive politicians, install supportive bureaucrats, and lobby to write laws in their favor. Pursuing these ends is the task and obligation of [illegible]

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CEOs.

Pharmaceutical companies are also deeply invested in the creation of a drug-friendly society.

"I and many other scientists now believe that in around 20 years we will have the means to reprogram our bodies' stone-age software so we can halt, then reverse, aging. Then nano-technology will let us live forever."
- Ray Kurzweil

The old promise of immortality.

Who reins in the corporations?

Scientists? Doctors? Politicians? The healthcare industry? Herbalists? Journalists? Health-conscious consumers?

No, the Food and Drug Administration !

- In 1989, a major scandal erupted involving charges of corruption within the FDA and the violation of racketeering and antitrust laws. Three FDA officials and two companies pleaded guilty to bribery, and it was discovered that several manufacturers had falsified data. Dozens of drugs were suspended or recalled by manufacturers.
- In July 2011, FDA officials were stunned when a scientific panel it had convened reported that the government's system for regulating many medical devices should be abandoned and replaced because it failed to examine their safety and effectiveness before sale.

Well, ... sort of.

Though not everyone thinks so. See "The FDA: Friendly Neighborhood Watchdog? Or Big Pharma Lapdog?"

The preceding two items came up from a cursory search on "Food and Drug Administration" in the database of the *New York Times*.

Conclusion

Any person, organization or program that works for or with, or accepts gifts or payments from drug companies is part of an industry that views everything as either a source of income or an expense.

In this reptilian mind-set you are either irritating, irrelevant, or lunch.

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Other installments in this series on ADHD can be downloaded as PDFs from this directory.

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