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BEHAVIORAL PSYCHOPHARMACOLOGY

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“Behavioral Psychopharmacology” is a term coined by Robert Sovner, M.D., to refer to a set of methodologies for using drug therapy (behavior modifying medications) with the developmentally disabled. Behavioral Psychopharmacology is based on the following premises:

1. Psychiatry can play a significant role in the treatment of behavioral and emotional problems in developmentally disabled persons.
2. The developmentally disabled population develops the full range of psychiatric disorders.
3. In some cases, ‘challenging behavior’ may be the presenting complaint of such a disorder.
4. There are now available highly effective psychotropic drugs which do not impede the habilitation process or cause tardive dyskinesia.
5. The application of psychiatric diagnostic and treatment principles can enable some developmentally disabled persons to acquire new skills and function more independently in the community.
6. In selected individuals, psychotropic drug therapy must be viewed as a treatment of first choice (e.g., those persons suffering from an affective disorder).

There seem to be 3 reasons that Behavior Modifying Medications are used with the Developmentally Disabled:

1. to control behavior by sedating when behavioral techniques are ineffective;
2. as the treatment of choice for a diagnosed psychiatric condition;
3. as the treatment of choice for a medication sensitive behavioral disorder.

I would suggest that abuse can occur when we are 1) too quick to use medication for the first reason and/or 2) too slow to use medication for the second and third reasons.

With our current emphasis and focus on the use of Positive Approaches to Behavior Management, I have noticed a slackening in concern about medications (i.e., in an attempt to reduce the use of restrictive behavioral interventions, medications tend to be increased). As a treatment of choice, this is fine; as a more subtle method of control, it is not!!!

NOTES: Dr. Sovner is an internationally recognized expert on the diagnosis of psychiatric disorders and the use of psychotropic drug therapy for adults with developmental disabilities.

Dr. Sovner is Co-Editor of "The Habilitative Mental Healthcare Newsletter", a great source of up to date information on Behavioral Psychopharmacology. The Address for this Newsletter is The Editors, P.O. Box 57, Bear Creek, NC 27207.

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