

RESEARCH SUMMARY:

Developmental-Behavioral Pediatric Evaluations for ADHD Include Developmental Testing and Multiple Informants

What can parents expect when their children's primary care clinician refers a child to a developmental-behavioral pediatrician for assessment of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)? This study asked 52 developmental-behavioral pediatricians at 12 different academic medical centers what steps they take in making the diagnosis of ADHD. The respondents completed a survey form right after the diagnosis was made. In this way, the study learned what the doctors actually did in more than 200 cases rather than what they thought or remembered they did after time had passed.

We found many differences across the 12 sites. Sometimes the child was seen for one visit, sometimes for more than one visit. We also found several common approaches. The developmental-behavioral pediatricians almost always reviewed a parent-completed behavior rating scale or questionnaire about the child. They also very frequently reviewed a teacher-completed behavior rating scale or questionnaire about the child. They also reviewed or completed at least one developmental assessment of the child. This testing gives information about the child's skills, in addition to their behavior. In the vast majority of cases, they found that children had not only ADHD but also at least one additional set of symptoms or one additional condition, such as learning difficulties or a sleep disorder. Even though the children in this study had ADHD, the doctors typically did not start the child on medication at the end of the diagnostic visits. Future studies will verify these findings using analyses of electronic medical records.

Reference:

Feldman HM, Blum NJ, Gahman A, Shults J, on behalf of the DBPNet Steering Committee. Diagnosis of Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder by Developmental Pediatricians in Academic Centers: A DBPNet Study. *Academic Pediatrics*. 2015 May-June;15(3):282-288. PMID: 25441653