

Problem

Aggressive marketing of second-generation antipsychotic medicines led to their widespread, use in children with behavioral issues—often when the drug’s use was not officially indicated. These “atypical” antipsychotics were heavily promoted as having fewer side effects than older drugs, downplaying serious metabolic risks like weight gain, diabetes, and gynecomastia (enlarged breasts in boys). This misleading representation contributed to overprescribing, particularly among children in foster care, prompting several states to eventually impose restrictions on their use in this young population.

Strategy

After consulting with psychiatrists who recognized the limited indications for prescribing these medications for particular children, we decided to acknowledge their potential benefits, while educating prescribers about their associated risks and the growing concerns of overprescribing.

Creative Solution

Using the overarching theme of ‘risk,’ we developed a series of digital and print ads designed to highlight the potential dangers of prescribing antipsychotics in children. One card depicted a child standing precariously atop a ladder, symbolizing the inherent risks of these medications. Another portrayed an overweight child sitting alone on a gym bench, visually conveying the isolation and stigma that can result from excessive weight gain. By utilizing evocative imagery rather than direct criticism, our approach encouraged healthcare



Riskier:
Side Effects Of Atypical Antipsychotics

- **Aripiprazole** – Anxiety, agitation, akathisia^{1,2}
- **Olanzapine** – Weight gain and other metabolic adverse effects, diabetes, somnolence, hyperlipidemia, akathisia^{1,2}
- **Quetiapine** – Somnolence, dizziness, constipation, postural hypotension, hyperglycemia, weight gain^{1,2}
- **Risperidone** – Parkinsonism, akathisia, dystonia, weight gain, prolactin elevation^{1,2}
- **Ziprasidone** – Mild-to-moderate somnolence, extrapyramidal symptoms, occasional paradoxical excitement^{1,2}

KNOW THE RISKS BEFORE DECIDING TO PRESCRIBE

1. Med Lett Drugs Ther. 2016 Aug 15; 58(1501): 103-6
2. Med Lett Drugs Ther. 2016 Dec 19; 58(1510): 160-4

Like all drugs, atypical antipsychotics have both benefits and risks. Please see complete efficacy and safety information in The Medical Letter newsletters.

For more information, visit www.rxbalance.org
© 2018 RxBalance. All rights reserved.

providers and parents to weigh the potential risks of these agents more carefully, before quickly accepting them without caution.

Results

These ads were distributed to pharmacists and physicians throughout the Pacific Northwest, garnering attention for both their message and visual impact. Updated versions were used to support the efforts of the Drug Effectiveness Review Project (DERP), a defunct Oregon-based collaboration of Medicaid and state public health programs, that conducted systematic reviews to inform public policy, including off-label use of antipsychotics in children. Our ads contributed to the broader conversation about responsible prescribing in pediatric mental health, with several states later implementing restrictions on off-label use of these drugs in children in foster care.

Tap into our Medical Advertising Expertise

If you’re a researcher or clinician with a healthcare or treatment focus, we’d love to collaborate with you. RxBalance can help extend the reach and impact of your research, insights, and healthcare policy work. Let’s explore how we can amplify your message together.

Let’s Work Together

