

May 14, 2012

TO: World Health Organization
RE: Establishment of International ADHD Awareness Day

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to encourage the WHO to establish an ADHD Awareness Day to assist in drawing the world's attention to this serious psychiatric disorder that afflicts 5-7% of children and 4-5% of adults worldwide. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, or ADHD, was first described in 1795 by the German physician, Melchior Adam Weikard, in his chapter on attention deficits in his medical textbook. Since then, the disorder has been studied extensively, especially since the 1970s, with more than 10,000 scientific papers published in the disorder to date. Each year, more than 400 scientific papers, books, and book chapters are published in the scientific literature on various aspects of this disorder. By 2008, the disorder had been shown to be among the most impairing disorders treated in outpatient psychiatry clinics, adversely affecting nearly every major life activity in which children and adults must function effectively. Not only does the disorder seriously disrupt the educational achievement of children and adults, but it also adversely impacts family functioning, peer relationships, community activities, and health in children. By adulthood, the disorder is known to negatively affect domains such as risky sexual behavior, risk for teenage pregnancies, impaired driving, poor financial management, and, of course, occupational functioning. Most recently the disorder has been shown to have a significant adverse impact on marriage and child-rearing.

ADHD is largely a result of genetic factors in most cases while others may arise from prenatal insults to the developing brain and a small percentage from brain injuries acquired after birth. It is now recognized as one of the 3 most genetically influenced psychiatric disorders rivaled only by autism and bipolar disorder. Social environmental factors do not appear to play a role in the initial etiology of ADHD but do have significant influences on the extent to which other mental and learning disorders may develop along with ADHD, the degree of impairment experienced in various major life activities, and the availability of resources for appropriate diagnosis and treatment.

Yet the disorder is among the most treatable conditions known to psychiatry. More treatments, particularly medications, are available to which more people respond positively (75-90%) with a greater degree of improvement across a wider array of major domains of life activities than is known for any other psychiatric condition. The problems faced for those with ADHD now are not so much ones of lack of effective treatments but limited awareness of the disorder, restricted or limited access to knowledgeable clinicians, and inconsistent availability of diagnostic and treatment services both within and across countries.

In view of these facts, I respectfully request that a day be set aside each year and be recognized by the WHO as ADHD Awareness Day.

Sincerely,



Russell A. Barkley, Ph.D.
Clinical Professor of Psychiatry and Pediatrics
Website: Russellbarkley.org