

Fear of ADHD rise

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March 28, 2007 12:00

Article from: **Daily Telegraph**

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PRESCRIPTIONS for ADHD drugs are set to increase with the addition of another drug to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, according to a doctor calling for a national monitoring system.

A long-acting medication similar to Ritalin will be added to the PBS from April 1, cutting the price from about \$150 per script to under \$30.

Dr George Halasz, from the Monash Medical Centre in Melbourne, said the inclusion of the drug on the PBS was likely to further boost Australia's ADHD rates – already among the highest in the world.

It is thought between 3 and 7 per cent of Australian school age children have the disorder which is characterised by inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity.

Dr Halasz, a child and adolescent psychiatrist, said he expected scripts for Concerta would now explode, following the prescribing pattern of Ritalin which rose tenfold after it went on the PBS in 2005. "I don't see why it shouldn't, I don't have any arguments to convince me at this stage it won't follow a similar pattern," he said.

He is calling for a detailed national patient notification system to monitor diagnostic and prescribing patterns, similar to what has been adopted in Western Australia.

The WA Government introduced the system in 2003 after a report found the state had a prescription rate triple the Australian average.

WA's chief medical adviser Dr Margaret Stevens said yesterday there had been a fall-off in scripts issued since its introduction.

"The primary purpose was to monitor and we do seem to have some reduction in notifications over the past few years," she said.

The PBS addition comes after researchers at the University of California found Australia, along with the US and Canada, was among the heaviest users of drugs to treat ADHD. Long-acting medications were blamed as one of the factors in the rising costs of ADHD medications according the study which said these types of drugs were easy to use and likely to become more prevalent.

Peak advocacy group Learning Difficulties Coalition of NSW president Jude Foster welcomed the PBS newcomer, saying the long-acting medication would help normalise school children's lives as they only had to take it once a day.

"And because of the cost it was really out of the price range of most families," she said.

Ms Foster also said there was an increase of Ritalin when it went on the PBS initially, but said numbers of children receiving stimulants in NSW has been static since 2002.