Intensive Use of Stimulants at Start Often Beneficial in ADHD

**By Damian McNamara**

**Miami Bureau**

**ORLANDO** — Start with a long-acting stimulant for treatment of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in the early stages of the disease, Dr. Peter S. Jensen said.

"What I would urge you not to do is start with long-acting stimulants for most patients, increase the dose before adding a short-acting drug, and monitor response with a rating scale," he said. "We now have studies of the stimulants—the methylphenidate preparations, the amphetamines, dextroamphetamine, and atomoxetine—showing sustained benefit through 12 months and up to 2 years."

The symptom profile for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) evolves with age. Hyperactivity, impulsivity, and inattention are predominant symptoms at an early age, but they are likely to be overlooked, said Dr. Jensen, director, Center for the Advancement of Children’s Mental Health, department of child psychiatry, Columbia University, New York.

Adolescents with ADHD are often easily distracted/inattentive, easily bored, impatient, and emotionally immature, compared with peers. "ADHD—the full syndrome—is rarely seen in adults. So many kids initially diagnosed with the full syndrome lose a lot of the hyperactivity and impulsivity as they get older," Dr. Jensen said. "What remains? Inattention." (J. Clin. Psychol. 2005;61:535-47.)

Monitor treatment response with age-appropriate rating scales, Dr. Jensen suggested. Examples include the Early Childhood Attention Deficit Disorder Evaluation scale for preschool children, the Child Behavior Checklist for school-age children, and the Adolescent Symptom Inventory for adolescents. In addition, the Brown Attention Deficit Disorder scales are useful for patients who are primarily inattentive.

"If we don’t use these, we are shooting from the hip. We get parent ratings and teacher ratings with these and it’s great documentation," Dr. Jensen said. "I graph them over months. It’s great documentation," Dr. Jensen said. "I graph them over months. It’s great documentation, We get parent ratings and teacher ratings with these and it’s great documentation," Dr. Jensen said. "I graph them over months. It’s great documentation."