

Preface

Adult attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder



Thomas J. Spencer, MD
Guest Editor

Until a decade ago, the validity of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in adults was considered controversial [1,2]. Although it was originally thought that individuals with ADHD inevitably outgrew the disorder, it is now thought the majority of children with ADHD continue to have significant ADHD-associated impairments as adults. Studies have shown that adults with ADHD are at risk for lower socio-economic status, more work difficulties, more frequent job changes, divorce, speeding violations, traffic accidents, and underachievement in college [3–9].

The third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* introduced a paradigm shift in the nosology of this condition. With the discovery of prominent cognitive deficits, what was formerly thought of as a disorder of motoric overactivity (hyperactive disorder) was now considered an attentional disorder. This advanced our understanding of ADHD in general, but it had a particularly profound impact on our appreciation of adult ADHD. Because disruptive outward manifestations of ADHD such as hyperactivity decrease with age, adult ADHD remained somewhat hidden and underdiagnosed. Adults have been shown to have the “look and feel” of ADHD children; however, childhood symptoms of ADHD transform over time and represent sequential age-appropriate developmental tasks. Difficulties of simple attention and focus in childhood persist and may be more evident in executive function deficits (eg, multitasking, time management, and so forth).

Like childhood ADHD, adult ADHD has a substantial genetic component, associated neuropsychologic deficits, and neuroimaging abnormalities

consistent with the idea that catecholaminergic hypoactivity in frontal–subcortical circuits underlie the disorder. Notably, in both childhood and adulthood, ADHD symptoms respond favorably to drugs that block either the dopamine or the norepinephrine transporter.

This issue of the *Psychiatric Clinics of North America* represents a synthesis of knowledge of adult ADHD presented by specialists in different fields. Given the multitude of recent scientific advancements, this issue provides an in-depth review of the state-of-the-art in adult ADHD research.

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