Serious Behavioral Disorders in Children and Adolescents

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This issue of Pediatric Annals is devoted to the worrisome disorders of depression and other serious mental health conditions in children and adolescents. All practitioners are aware that these are common disorders in this age group, with estimates of 2% to 6% being affected at any point in time and an overall prevalence of 20% by the late adolescent period. Many or most families (including my own) have one or more members with depression or a related condition. Unfortunately, many pediatric practitioners must assume primary management of some of these patients because of the unavailability or inaccessibility of psychiatrists or psychologists in some geographic areas. In addition, a depressed child may present with symptoms to the primary care provider before they reach out to a mental health professional. Knowing the most current treatment options supported by literature can aid in providing proper patient referrals.

The articles in this issue provide considerable practical management assistance and summarize the available data regarding treatment with psychotherapeutic drugs and other potential therapeutic modalities.

Emslie and colleagues (see page 300) review three studies of antide-
pressant medication and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), and the studies’ findings related to the treatment of depression in adolescents.

Mahoney and colleagues (see page 307) discuss CBT for adolescent depression, reviewing controlled trials of CBT alone, medication alone, and combination therapy with both modalities.

Hughes and Asarnow (see page 314) make the case for including families in depression treatment of adolescents, and discuss family-oriented treatments versus individual treatments.

Joiner and Ribeiro contribute an article about assessment and management of suicidal behavior (see page 319) that provides preventive and management strategies that can be very useful, including safety planning and the use of a Hope Box.

Accompanying this column is one of the very few stamps that relate to the theme of mental health. Canada issued the orange, yellow, and green stamp in 2010 to raise money for mental health (Santé Mentale) activities (see page 287). This is a semi-postal stamp (similar to the US breast cancer stamp), which has a surcharge attached to the actual postal value of the stamp. This is indicated by the “+10” in the lower right corner. Canada Post has issued such a stamp each year since 2008, and this effort has raised more than $2.5 million to provide improved access to diagnostic, treatment, and support programs for those with mental health disorders. Unrelated is the colorful 2010 Mexican stamp that celebrates the Day of the Grandparents (Dia de los Abuelos). (Full disclosure: I am the grandfather of two wonderful boys!)

I hope the articles in this issue will help you better identify, diagnose, and treat symptoms of depression in your pediatric patients.

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