Face of Eating Disorders Changing

More minority women are being diagnosed with anorexia and bulimia.

For years, eating disorders seemed to affect almost exclusively young, primarily affluent, white women. More recently, however, specialists have found the condition among more women of other racial and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Some experts believe eating disorders have been underdiagnosed among these groups because their physicians believe they don’t “fit the profile.” The factors that contribute to eating disorders among minority groups may be very different from those common among whites; for example, a second-generation Asian woman may change her eating habits in an effort to separate herself from her parents and becoming more “Americanized” in her behavior.

In addition, black and Hispanic women in particular may face increasing risks of anorexia and bulimia because of efforts to combat obesity rates, which are higher among these groups. Ethnic groups also have not been targeted by educational and awareness programs, and low-income women may have difficulty finding effective treatment options.


Prescription Drug Abuse Rising Among Teens

A new study has found the abuse of prescription medications is on the rise among teenagers.

The 17th annual survey of more than 7,300 teens, conducted by the Partnership for a Drug-Free America, found about 1 in 5 teens has abused prescription painkillers; 18% reported using hydrocodone to get high. Approximately 10% said they had used either oxycodone or stimulants prescribed for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. Teenagers cited “ease of access” as one of the primary factors in their abuse of these medications. Fewer than half (48%) believed they faced any major risks in using the drugs.

The study also asked about over-the-counter medications for the first time and found 9% of teenagers had used cough syrups and other products to get high.

At the same time, experimentation with illegal drugs declined. Marijuana use dropped to 37% from 42% 6 years earlier, while ecstasy use fell from 12% to 9%. In addition, methamphetamine use declined from 12% to 8%.

WARNING ISSUED FOR
ANTIPSYCHOTICS IN ELDERLY

The Food and Drug Administration has issued a warning that older patients with dementia who take some antipsychotic medications face a higher risk of premature death. The decision was based on analysis of 17 studies of the drugs, which showed the rate of death among elderly patients was approximately 1.6 times that of patients taking a placebo. Manufacturers of the drugs, variously approved for treatment of schizophrenia, mania, and depression in bipolar disorder, will add warnings to the labels about the risks stating that the medications are not approved for treatment of dementia in the elderly.


GENE THERAPY SLOWS ALZHEIMER’S

Researchers have found an experimental treatment using gene therapy to treat patients with Alzheimer’s disease significantly slows the progression of the disease. The treatment has been used on only a few patients so far, but the results are being viewed as extremely positive.

The research involved taking skin cells from patients with early stage Alzheimer’s and modifying the genes so that they would secrete nerve growth factor, a protein found in healthy brains. These cells were then placed directly on affected areas of the brain. Six patients were followed for nearly 2 years and given various cognitive tests, which showed a 36% to 51% decrease in their rate of cognitive decline. These results are better than those found in patients treated with Alzheimer’s medications, researchers said. PET scans also showed increases in metabolic activity in the patients’ brains.


Choosing Medications for Children Can Be Risky Business

A recent study has found that approximately 28% of parents whose children take psychoactive medications found the treatments to be somewhat or extremely unhelpful, suggesting that the children are being prescribed the wrong medications for their conditions.

Conducted by the New York University Child Study Center, the research found 15% of parents with children ages 5 to 18 give their children psychoactive medications each day. Children with a single diagnosis, such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, often respond to prescribed medications well. However, in contrast, for those with comorbid conditions, medication for one diagnosis can affect or override medication for a different diagnosis. In addition, even when the right drugs are selected, dosage problems may arise; the rate of metabolism for some medications is higher in some children than in adults, but raising doses to compensate may increase side effects.

Experts recommend referring complex, difficult-to-treat pediatric cases to specialists. However, because only 7,000 child psychiatrists are practicing in the United States, referral options may be limited. That means much of the prescribing is done by nonspecialists, primarily general practitioners or pediatricians.