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6,200 B.C. children on unapproved medication **45 prescriptions were written for children aged six or younger, documents show**

More than 6,200 children in this province are taking anti-depressants that have shown negative test results and have never been approved for their use.

Documents obtained by Vancouver Sun columnist Daphne Bramham also show that in 2002, British Columbia doctors prescribed more than twice as many SSRIs, or selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, to children and youths than they did five years earlier.

The data was provided by PharmaNet -- the provincial government's pharmacy network -- in response to an Access to Information request and showed that B.C. doctors wrote 49,667 pediatric prescriptions for SSRIs in 2002. More than 45 of those prescriptions were written for children aged six and younger -- a group for whom there are no recognized diagnostic tests for anxiety or depression.

Dr. Jane Garland, director of the mood disorders clinic at B.C. Children's Hospital, says there have been several trials that have shown the ineffectiveness of these drugs on adolescents and children, but neither she nor the physicians who prescribe the medications have been allowed to see the results.

"There's been 15 anti-depressant trials on young people, but only three of them were published because the rest were negative -- they showed the medication didn't work," Garland said. "That's part of the whole crisis we're in."

On Monday, Health Canada issued a public health advisory to patients aged 18 and younger who are taking one or more of seven types of antidepressants, including Zoloft, Paxil and Wellbutrin. The advisory did not recommend children and youths stop taking the drugs, but said those patients "should consult their treating physician to confirm that the benefits of the drug still outweigh its potential risks in light of recent safety concerns."

Last December, Britain made a recommendation against prescribing all antidepressants except Prozac to patients under the age of 19. In announcing the recommendation, British health authorities cited research that suggests certain antidepressants may increase the risk of suicidal behaviour in children and youths.

Much of that research was from the drug trials that were never published, Garland said. In the United States, the Food and Drug Administration is holding public hearings to determine whether antidepressants are safe for use by patients under the age of 18.

Garland said Health Canada is planning to do a similar review of the drugs, but added it is "very unlikely" the federal agency will determine the medications should not be used by young people.

PRESCRIPTIONS FOR ANTI-DEPRESSANTS

B.C. doctors wrote nearly 30,000 prescriptions for selective serotonin re-uptake inhibitors for children and teenagers in 1999.

Age	Paxil	Zoloft	Effexor	Celexa	Prozac	Total
0 to 6	83	76	6	0	184	349
7 to 14	3,544	2,908	731	92	2,900	10,175
15 to 18	7,081	5,595	2,399	281	4,047	19,403
Total	10,708	8,579	3,136	373	7,131	29,927