

When ADD Medication Spurs Teen Suicide

Fourteen million young people between the ages of 20 and 40 take the prescription drug **Adderall**, or one like it, to treat **Attention Deficit Disorder**.

Many who take it and even those who prescribe it believe it's helpful, or at least harmless.

But that's not always the case. For Richard Fee, his Adderall addiction led to his suicide.

'Adderall Destroyed Him'

Since childhood, Richard Fee lived a storybook life: straight-As, star athlete, lots of friends. Then he started taking Adderall.

His mother, Kathy Fee, said she hardly recognized her son when he was taking Adderall.

"It just changed his whole thought process," she recalled. "His mental process, his actions, the things that he did."

Over the course of three years, Richard's life spiraled out of control – until his father found Richard hanging in his closet.

Through tears, Ricky Fee remembers that awful moment.

"Worst possible thing you can possibly imagine," he said. "I mean here was this great kid who had everything going for him. Everything. Smart, good-looking kid, and the Adderall just destroyed him."

Dangerous Felony

Adderall is prescribed for people with Attention Deficit

Disorder, or **ADD**. It works on the brain to help them focus.

But some people who don't have ADD believe Adderall **helps them focus**, too, and take it to help them study.

Richard appears to have been one of those. His father recalled a conversation when Richard was in college.

"Richard had mentioned to me that he had gotten an Adderall from one of his friends at exam time," he said.

Richard is not alone. An estimated one in five college students take Adderall, largely unaware of the physical danger and the legal danger. It's a felony to give your prescription to someone or use someone else's prescription.

Richard's sister Ryan, who is currently a college student, said there is no stigma associated with taking Adderall even if you don't have ADD.

In fact, she said students are open about it.

"You hear in the library, during exam week, people asking each other, 'I really need an Adderall pill,'" she said. "People do offer it to each other. It's not a big deal to people on campus."

Doctor Shopping Students

After getting Adderall from other students, Richard soon wanted his own supply.

Ricky Fee said the first time his son got a **prescription** was when he saw a doctor at college.

"If you go to a doctor and tell them you have the signs of ADD, without any checking, they'll just give you a prescription," he said. "And that's basically what he did."

Dr. Gretchen LeFever Watson, a clinical psychologist, researches the misuse of drugs like Adderall. She said it's

easy to **fake ADD**.

"If you talk to most college students, they could tell you a doctor or two or three in town to go to, and what to say or do in order to get a prescription," she said. "And depending on the doctor it might be 15 minutes or 45 minutes at the most, and you walk out with a diagnosis and a prescription."

Adderall is a **Class 2 Narcotic**, an **amphetamine** similar to **cocaine**. It can be very addictive.

Dr. Lefever Watson said Adderall use is sometimes like riding an emotional roller coaster.

"Often people feel a little of the drug is good, more is a little bit better," she explained. "So they take more and more."

"You can get a **euphoric feeling** with a crash afterwards. But people will sometimes say that euphoria, or that high level of performance, is worth the crash," she said.

Confronting His Doctors

After graduating college, Richard moved back home with his parents. His father said he and Richard's mother noticed right away how the Adderall had taken hold of his son.

"Richard would be up for days," he remembered. "Be up for three days in a row. Walking the house, 3, 4, 5 o'clock in the morning, wide awake. And then he would crash for a couple days and sleep for a couple days."

When Richard was back home, he was able to convince two separate doctors to each prescribe him Adderall. His parents tried to get his doctors to stop prescribing the drug.

"I said you keep giving Adderall to my son you're going to kill him," Ricky said.

But Richard was over 18, and his doctors said, legally, Richard's treatment was private.

Kathy Fee recalled the day she and her husband confronted one of their son's doctors.

"He actually stayed in the reception area behind the little glass partition," she said. "And said he couldn't talk to us. And my husband says, 'Well, you need to talk to us.' And he said, 'Your child is an adult.'"

Psychotic Effects

Over time, both of Richard's hometown doctors increased his dose.

Dr. LeFever Watson described what can happen when people take too much of the drug.

"As things progress, you can become more seriously **addicted** and **psychotic**, and lose the ability to think clearly, and do things that you otherwise wouldn't do," she explained.

That's exactly what happened to Richard.

Kathy Fee remembers her son was always so clear-headed before taking Adderall. After that, he exhibited bouts of extreme paranoia.

"He was on the computer, and he put little pieces of scotch tape on his fingers because he didn't want the keyboard to get his fingerprints. Why, I don't know," she continued. "He covered up the camera on it because he felt like people could be watching him."

His father lamented how the cheerful and peaceful child he'd known since birth was now **dangerous**.

"During this time Richard's becoming more violent. He's making threats," he said. "I mean we were scared of our own son

during that time. We slept with our doors locked.”

‘This Should Never Happen’

Not long after that, Richard took his own life.

Through anguished tears, his mother cried, “This should have never ever happened. And it was the Adderall.”

People familiar with Richard’s story say it illustrates the need for stricter guidelines for diagnosing ADD, and that when an ADD diagnosis is made, doctors should try **non-pharmaceutical treatments** before prescribing Adderall.

Dr. LeFever Watson said the research supports this theory.

“There is now clear evidence that the medication should be, in most instances, the last line of defense. And not the first line of defense,” she said. “I think that’s a major part of the problem that we’re having, is that people are coming to assume, even if you have the diagnosis, that means you should be medicated.”

“What the research is clearly showing is that over the long term the drugs are not as effective as the behavioral interventions,” she continued. “So if the behavioral interventions are as, or more effective, than the drug treatment, and they don’t come with the risks associated with drug treatment, then why are we using so many drugs instead of other interventions?”

Telling Their Story

As for their part, the Fees would like to see changes requiring physicians to see what other prescriptions their patients are taking.

They also think doctors should be required to notify parents of adult children when the doctor thinks that adult child might be in danger.

Ricky Fee said it wasn't until after his son died that his doctor's turned over Richard's medical records.

"There was information that they had in their file," he said, "that if they had shared with us at that time we like to think things would have been different. They noted in Richard's file that they thought he was **suicidal**."

"But nobody ever said anything to us," he said.

The Fees say people who are addicted need to find a qualified professional to help ween them off it.

"I mean you just don't cold turkey the stuff," Kathy Fee said. "You need to be taken off it slowly."

The Fees said their son's suicide came two weeks after his prescription ran out and that he was unable to see either of his doctors to get more.

"That's what gets me, the doctor cutting him off like that, 'I'm not going to give it to you any more,'" Kathy Fee said. "They should have called us. They should have worked out something and gotten him help, and taken him off like you're supposed to do any kind of drug that you're addicted to."

CBN News requested interviews with both doctors. One declined, the other did not respond to the request.

Although the Fees can't get their son back, they hope telling his story will prevent others from losing their loved ones.

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