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Trends. The Politics of Psychopathology: Ritalin Conspiracy as Paranoia or as Good Business?

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Two lawsuits were recently filed in federal courts in the United States--viz., California and New Jersey--alleging that a pharmaceutical company and the American Psychiatric Association conspired to create a market for Ritalin and expand its use. Subtexts to the allegations are that there have been efforts to over-diagnose attention deficit disorder, to over-subscribe Ritalin to "treat" the disorder and related disorder, and to over-sell the benefits and under-sell the costs of the drug. Certainly, one defense making the allegation a prototype of paranoia would be that company and association are only doing what's best for human welfare--that they engage in selfless and saintly behavior that is financially remunerated only to cover basic survival needs and some sort of equitable mark-up. The "good business" counter to this defense is that company and association are only doing what's best for their own human welfare. This counter would no doubt cite exploitation of parents' concerns for the welfare of their children, the welcome contention that a magic bullet--i.e., the magic pill of Ritalin--can resolve psychological problems, and the notion that problematic behavior is biologically based without a familial, parental, or other social context.

A preliminary conclusion as the lawsuits play out? Those who believe that science and politics do not intimately intersect may need a magic pill of their own. (See Bramble, D. (2000). Psychostimulants and psychiatrists: The Trent Adult Psychiatry Psychostimulant Survey. *Journal of Psychopharmacology*, 14, 67-69; Meier, B. (September 14, 2000). Suits charge conspiracy to expand Ritalin use. *The New York Times*, p. A17; Pozzi, M.E. (2000). Ritalin for whom? Understanding the need for Ritalin in psychodynamic counselling with families of under-5s. *Journal of Child Psychotherapy*, 26, 25-43; Safer, D.J. (1994). The impact of recent lawsuits on methylphenidate sales. *Clinical Pediatrics*, 33, 166-168; Safer, D.J. (2000). Are stimulants overprescribed for youths with ADHD? *Annals of Clinical Psychiatry*, 12, 55-62.) (Keywords: Lawsuit, Pharmaceutical Companies, Ritalin.)