**Management approaches for ADHD during the COVID-19 virus pandemic: guidance from the European ADHD Guidelines Group (EAGG)**

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The current COVID-19 virus crisis is creating unprecedented challenges at every level of society. Individuals with neurodevelopmental disorders such as Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are particularly vulnerable and may display increased behavioural problems. The current crisis also poses several important questions for their clinicians on how best to deliver care within the new restrictions.

This document provides a summary of the guidance on the assessment and management of ADHD during the COVID-19 virus pandemic, developed by the European ADHD Guidelines Group (EAGG). The full guidance is reported in the Appendix.

**Diagnosis, follow-up assessments, and monitoring**

Given the requirement for physical distancing in clinicians and patients, all relevant service provision should continue to take place using telephone or appropriate online video technology, in line with current recommendations for the use of telepsychiatry (e.g., guidance from the Royal College of Psychiatrists1 or the American Psychiatric Association2).

 Across the age groups, the current crisis can be particularly challenging for adolescents, and even more for those with ADHD. Schools and teachers should try to monitor all their students but should include those with ADHD, especially adolescents, as a priority group, due to their disorganisation and increased level of risks (e.g., are they participating in online classes, are they submitting their tasks? Are there worries about their social emotional well-being?)

**The importance of behavioural management strategies**

 For families with children with ADHD, the EAGG recommends the use of behavioural parenting strategies because it improves parenting and has beneficial effects in reducing oppositional defiant and disruptive behaviour, which is common in ADHD.3 Under the current circumstances, when face-to-face support is not possible, parents will have to rely on self-help versions of evidence-based systems. The efficacy of some of these are supported by trial evidence.4-6 Some online systems have also been shown to have value.7 However, parents must be cautious and avoid paying for untested applications that could do more harm than good. Under the current circumstances, the EAGG highlights six essential messages reported in Table 1 in the Appendix.

 In relation to other non-pharmacological strategies,patients using neurofeedback or cognitive training should be encouraged to continue practicing transfer exercises during homework and new challenges.

**Pharmacological management**

* Individuals with ADHD should, if clinically indicated and as recommended in standard national guidelines, be offered the opportunity to start on a pharmacological treatment after completion of the initial assessment or, if already on medication, continue with this as usual. Being prevented access to pharmacological treatment after the initial assessment or failure to continue ongoing pharmacological treatment may increase health risks related to COVID-19 virus infection, as behaviour related to ADHD may become more disorganised and poorly controlled at this time, adversely impacting on the ability to comply with the requirements for physical distancing.
* It is hoped that regulatory authorities will allow for some flexibility around restrictions to access ADHD medications during the COVID-19 virus crisis to make sure patients receive their medication in a timely manner.
* Parents of children with ADHD and adolescents/adults with ADHD should avoid increasing doses or adding additonal doses (beyond those prescribed) to manage crisis/stress related to confinement. Likewise, the use of antipsychotics to manage disruptive behaviour or of sedative agents when not clinically indicated should be avoided.
* In our previous recommendations we stated that “the risk-benefit balance of drug holidays during weekend must be taken into account and better investigated”.8 Given that family confinement and physical distancing may exacerbate ADHD related risks, we see no strong rationale to introduce weekend drug-holidays during the current crisis.
* Monitoring of possible adverse events during pharmacological treatment:
1. Routine cardiovascular clinical examination and face-to-face monitoring for individuals with ADHD without any cardiovascular risk factors could be postponed until routine face-to-face visits are reinstated, as currently the risks from conducting face-to-face cardiovascular assessments in this patient group outweigh the benefits of cardiac monitoring. When possible, home monitoring of blood pressure and pulse using home blood pressure machines is recommended, following the guidance detailed in Table 2 in the Appendix. Patients should contact their prescribers should they experience any emerging cardiovascular symptom (e.g., chest pain, prolonged palpitations, and breathing difficulties), or any other concerning symptoms.
2. Whilst sleep-onset delay is a possible adverse event during psychostimulants treatment, sleep disruption may also be accounted for by other factors, such as stress, late morning waking and disruption of daily routines related to the COVID-19 virus crisis. Appropriate sleep hygiene should be implemented/reinforced in preference to increasing the doses of melatonin beyond the therapeutic range (up to 5-6 mg/nocte9).
3. Headache can occur during treatment with psychostimulants. Given uncertainty around its possible unfavourable effects in patients with COVID-19 virus infection10, ibuprofen for headache should be avoided.

**Conclusions**

In summary, COVID-19 virus infection and the attendant physical distancing are presenting many challenges for children, young people and their families, and these are likely to be considerably greater for those with ADHD. It will therefore be even more important to draw upon the strategies routinely recommended in parent-focussed ADHD interventions, as well as mental well-being interventions for children and young people. The inability to undertake routine, face-to-face clinical visits to initiate and monitor medication should not be viewed as an absolute contraindication to pharmacotherapy. Instead, the risks and benefits of initiating/maintaining medication under the current COVID-19 virus guidance should be carefully considered. Where the use of medication is deemed desirable, strategies for remote

monitoring, as described above, should be implemented.

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