
PAUQUETTE NEWS

The Pauquette Center for Psychological Services Newsletter

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Understanding Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

By Jocelyn Miller, Ph.D.

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (also known as ADHD or ADD) is frequently misunderstood and misdiagnosed. People think, “There’s no such thing as ADHD, they are just naughty kids.” There are a lot of myths about the medications used to treat ADHD - “Ritalin is a very bad, harmful medication. I don’t want my kid on Ritalin.”

The science of this diagnosis shows that the disorder has been recognized for most of the 20th century. It was widely understood to be caused by something awry in the brain back in the 1960’s. The core symptoms of the diagnosis - problems staying focused, distractibility, and a very high physical activity level - have been the same all throughout the decades and the different names for the disorder.



Medical science still has a long way to go in being able to detect and diagnose ADHD. There is not a definitive medical lab test for ADHD, like there is for strep throat or meningitis. Brain scanning technology, such as functional magnetic resonance imaging, has documented subtle differences in the brains of those with ADHD compared to those without, but these differences only show up when comparing groups to each other, not individuals. An fMRI is very expensive, and since the science of diagnosing individuals using this technology has not been fully refined, the procedure is not currently used by the medical profession in the diagnosis of ADHD.

Instead, ADHD is usually diagnosed by observation only. There are standardized rating scales that can be used to compare how a parent or teacher rates a child in relation to their same age and gender peers, but rating scales only tell us if the child’s behavior falls outside the normal range in certain areas. These ratings do not clarify what is causing the child to behave in a restless or inattentive way.

Here at Pauquette, we have been using a psychological test to aid in the diagnosis of ADHD for the past 7 years. This test is called the Test of Variables of Attention, or TOVA. It is a computerized tool, that measures attention and concentration as it is happening. The TOVA can be used with children from age 6 through adulthood, and compares the person’s attention and concentration to peers of their same age and gender.

With the TOVA, psychologists can measure **why** a person is showing the behaviors that look like attention deficit hyperactivity disorder on the surface. Is it a true disorder in the brain? Is it due to other causes like motivational issues? About 50% of those who are sent to Pauquette for testing because someone thinks they have ADHD, do not actually have ADHD. Instead, they have behaviors that look like ADHD, but the TOVA test reveals that the behaviors are caused by something else, such as anxiety or emotional problems.

If you would like to be evaluated for ADHD, or seek such an evaluation for your child, it is a two-step process. An initial appointment is scheduled with any of our therapists in any of our 6 locations. This first appointment will focus on getting a wide range of information about your background and symptoms. Then you will be referred for testing with one of our psychologists, if the evaluating therapist agrees that it makes sense to seek this service. Some health insurance companies do not cover any psychological testing, and so we also offer this service on a self-pay basis when necessary. Our psychologists are also available in all 6 of our clinic locations.

During the testing session, you will be given the results of the testing, the diagnosis that the psychologist is making, and recommendations. If ADHD is diagnosed, no medication will be offered at that appointment, as psychologists do not have prescription authority in Wisconsin. The psychologist will work with you to identify next steps should you choose to seek medication treatment for ADHD, and will collaborate with your PCP or other prescriber as needed.

Many children are diagnosed with ADHD every day, with less data than is gained through this two-step process. This means many of them are misdiagnosed, and so it is no wonder when they have trouble with the medication they are subsequently prescribed. It is worth it to go through the extra time and steps that Pauquette provides, to make sure that ADHD is the real diagnosis, and that treatment for that diagnosis will be helpful.



- Melissa Chesmore, MSN, APNP Baraboo, Richland Center, Sauk
- Linda Stollfus, MSW, LCSW Columbus
- Jen Gruba, MS, LMFT, PhD Intern Baraboo, Sauk, Portage (starting soon)
- Danielle Sarver, Receptionist Portage
- Patty Dover, Receptionist Portage & Baraboo
- Brenda Austin, Receptionist Sauk
- Cindy Clement, Receptionist Richland Center

See a description of all our therapists & their locations @ www.Pauquette.com

CHECK OUT OUR FACEBOOK PAGE FOR TIPS AND STRATEGIES ON MENTAL HEALTH, WELLNESS, AND PARENTING.



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