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The ADHD Handbook

BEVAN WANG

Stuart Passmore hopes his new book will help clarify some of the misconceptions that surround attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is often described as one of the most difficult issues in the medical community. Australian clinical psychologist Stuart Passmore specialises in parenting children with behavioural disorders and has written a new book in an attempt to offer some clarity on a complicated and often misunderstood subject.

'The reason I wrote *The ADHD Handbook* was because I wanted to try and shed some light on what ADHD is,' he explained. 'One of the things that prompted me to start writing is the confusion and misinformation about ADHD in the public.'

Referencing more than 250 primary sources and taking more than 18 months to complete, Passmore's book uses evidence from research conducted around the world.

'My conclusions are based around the available research from fields such as neurology, psychology, psychoneurology, psychiatry, medical research, brain imaging and neurobiology,' he explained.

Mixed messages

While many believe the prevalence of ADHD in Australian children to be 5–10%, research has shown boys are more likely to be diagnosed than girls because their symptoms are often more pronounced, and thus more easily identifiable.

'When we look at the numbers and statistics, it seems that the difference is that boys seem to be diagnosed with ADHD combined type, while girls seem to be more prone to the inattentive type,' Passmore said.

'Where the combined type is characterised by loud, boisterous, rowdy, up and down, running-around-the-room kind of behaviour, the inattentive type is quite quiet and it can easily go unnoticed in school, for instance.'

Passmore believes many families who have children with ADHD will likely understand the emotional anguish that comes with the disorder before and after diagnosis.

'There is so much that families have to go through when they have a child who is diagnosed with ADHD, from the actual symptoms right through to community sentiment,' Passmore said. 'ADHD is not confined to one area of the child's life and depression and anxiety are often comorbid with ADHD as well. There are big issues that surround that.'

Having the disorder but being unable to fully understand what is happening is often an emotional and extremely frustrating experience for a child.

'There is a lot of confusion for the child that they have to work through, as well as the physical and emotional issues that come up, such as peer rejection,' Passmore explained. 'These are the things that young children have to face so early on in life.'

'I think one of the saddest things I have heard was a seven-year-old boy who asked me the question, "What is wrong with me?"

'They are getting so many mixed messages all the time and they hear that they are naughty kids to horrible kids to a difficult person to people telling them they have some sort of problem.'

Gateway to diagnosis

Passmore believes that as GPs become more aware of ADHD they are able to detect it more rapidly and refer the child to a psychiatrist or psychologist to begin the process of diagnosis.

'GPs are the gateway for a lot of individuals and certainly around mental health this is especially true,' he said.

'We need to make sure that the GP is well equipped to recognise the signs of ADHD because they are the ones who provide continuous care. Without their referral, without them first suspecting the diagnosis, the process cannot begin.'

It is hoped that GPs can help in correctly identifying cases of ADHD in children, avoiding what Passmore describes as the misunderstanding and consequent underdiagnosis of the disorder.

'There is a bit of a problem with ADHD diagnosis as there are some individuals who do not understand what it is,' Passmore said. 'There are people that are ill-qualified and ill-experienced who are performing diagnoses and this can lead to an increase of cases when there does not need to be.'

While the authors of an Australian study published in the *BMJ* in 2013 claim the 'overdiagnosis of ADHD resides within the clinical subjectivity of impairment', Passmore disagrees and believes better education is essential.

“We need to make sure the GP is well equipped to recognise the signs of ADHD”

'When an appropriately trained and qualified individual does these assessments, it is not by any means subjective,' he said. 'There are a number of tools that are used and a number of individuals that are involved in that process. We use a battery of assessment and, on top of that, the child must undergo a check-up with the paediatrician because we know that there are other medical disorders and other psychological disorders that mimic the symptoms of ADHD.'

Choosing to medicate

The use of medication as a treatment for ADHD in children is one of the most

controversial areas surrounding the disorder. Passmore believes the decision to medicate depends on severity.

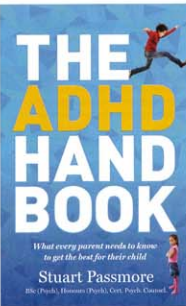
'There are some children who do not necessarily need medication, and that would be the primary decision of the paediatrician or the child psychiatrist that is reviewing the case,' he explained. 'I have certainly dealt with children that their symptoms, the severity of their symptoms, are not that bad and so their parents can manage the child without the medication.'

Passmore believes the best approach is to consider each patient's circumstances and assess them individually.

'The way I do it, and the way I believe anyone who works with ADHD kids should do it, is to treat every case as an individual case. Modality needs to be set for that individual.'

References

1. Panu R, Billo RH, Blumberg SJ, et al. Mental Health Surveillance Among Children – United States, 2005–2011. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 2013;62(2):1–36.
2. Thomas R, Mitchell GK, Babbala L. Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder: are we helping or harming? *BMJ* 2013;347.



Psychologist Stuart Passmore believes GPs play a key role in the early detection of ADHD symptoms in children.

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Key dates

- Voting opens 16 June 2014
- Voting closes 11 July 2014
- Declaration of poll 14 July 2014

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Turn to page 22 to read more about the RACGP's budget response, and join the conversation on Twitter at #CoPayNoWay.

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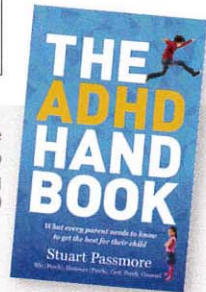
The ADHD Handbook: what every parent needs to know to get the best for their child

With his new publication, *The ADHD Handbook*, Australian psychologist Stuart Passmore has tried to offer some clarity on what is a complicated and often misunderstood subject.

Using the latest research, Passmore's evidenced-based book examines the diagnosis, brain anatomy, treatment types, psychotherapies, parenting techniques and common misconceptions of ADHD.

If you would like to enter the draw to win one of 10 copies of this book, please email your name and postal address to goodpractice@racgp.org.au **Entries close 13 June 2014**

Author: Stuart Passmore
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Turn to page 12 to read more about *The ADHD Handbook*.