Antipsychotics: Broadened Use Brings Concerns
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Of the hundreds of pharmaceuticals available through Medicaid from 2000-2010, the single most costly therapeutic class for both children and adults was antipsychotics.1 Recent media attention in Kentucky, however, has focused on the alleged misuse of these drugs—not their cost.2 While these drugs undoubtedly help many of the individuals who use them, there is a growing sense that antipsychotics are routinely prescribed unnecessarily.3 Studies show that a majority of children receiving antipsychotics have not been diagnosed with a condition for which the FDA has approved their use, such as schizophrenia.4 Instead, children exhibiting disruptive or aggressive behavior, without a FDA-approved diagnosis, for example, are receiving these drugs.5 From 2000 to 2010, the number of grams dispensed in Kentucky per 1,000 member-years to Medicaid-eligible adults increased from 914 grams to 1,400—an increase of 53% (see Figure 1).6 Children, on the other hand, experienced a more rapid increase from 81 to 302 grams—an increase of over 270%.

In a collaborative effort between the College of Communication and Information, Center for Business and Economic Research, and Institute for Pharmaceutical Outcomes and Policy—and funded by the Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky—we examine the Medicaid antipsychotic pharmaceutical outpatient utilization by children (18 and younger) and adults (19 and older) from 2000 to 2010.7

Among children the largest increase in dispensed grams was among minorities, which increased to 635 grams in 2010, compared to 217 grams for Whites (Figure 2).8 Among children, Marion County has the highest usage at 599 grams while Caldwell County shows the highest amount for adults at 3,954 grams. By comparison, the counties with the lowest usage are a fraction of these totals (Table 1, Figure 3, and Figure 4).

The long-term developmental, metabolic, and public finance effects of children taking antipsychotics are not fully understood and could have important future public policy consequences.
Marion County has the highest usage for children at 599 grams, while Caldwell County has the highest for adults at nearly 4,000 grams.
FIGURE 3
Dispensed Antipsychotics in Kentucky, Medicaid-Eligible Children, 2000-2010

Source: Author’s analysis of Kentucky Medicaid data from The University of Kentucky, College of Pharmacy, Institute for Pharmaceutical Outcomes and Policy (IPOP).
FIGURE 4
Dispensed Antipsychotics in Kentucky, Medicaid-Eligible Adults, 2000-2010

Source: Author’s analysis of Kentucky Medicaid data from The University of Kentucky, College of Pharmacy, Institute for Pharmaceutical Outcomes and Policy (IPOP).