

Who Cares for Patients with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)? Insights from Nordbaden, Germany

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ADHD is one of the most common disorders of childhood and adolescence. Longitudinal studies have shown ADHD to frequently persist into adulthood. ***Purpose:*** To examine its age and gender specific administrative prevalence and to use this data to evaluate the involvement of physicians and physician groups in health care provision for ADHD patients. ***Methods:*** The comprehensive medical claims database of the Association of Statutory Health Insurance Physicians in Nordbaden, Germany, covering an insured population of 2.238 million in 2003, corresponding to 82.2% of the total regional population, was used to retrospectively identify patients with a diagnosis of ADHD (hyperkinetic [conduct] disorder, F90.0, F90.1 according to ICD-10) and their physician contacts. ***Results:*** Administrative prevalence was highest among children age 7-12 (4.97%; boys, 7.16%; girls, 2.65%). Prevalence rates were 1.26% (boys, 1.72%; girls, 0.77%) in preschoolers (age 1-6), 1.31% (males, 1.99%; females, 0.60%) in adolescents (age 13-19), and 0.04% in adults (age 20 or higher). 36% (13.0%) of children and adolescents and 33.5% (12.5%) of adults with a diagnosis of ADHD were seen by a specialized physician at least one (four times) during the year. Concentration analyses showed that the top 20% (50%) of child and adolescent psychiatrists accounted for 58.3% (92.1%) of all patients seen by this discipline, while 20% did not participate in care for patients with ADHD. Concentration was comparably high among pediatricians and much higher among practitioners. ***Conclusions:*** ADHD diagnosis rates in children and adolescents were in line with estimates based on DSM-IV, but not ICD-10. In striking contrast, ADHD was rarely recognized in adults. Most patients were not seen by a specialized physician, and only a minority was treated by, or under supervision of, a mental health care specialist. The high concentration of care within physician groups may reflect the still controversial nature of the disorder.

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