

National News

HMOs Push Psychoactive Drugs for Children

The runaway prescribing of anti-depressant drugs for children—with almost 3 million prescriptions written in 1999—is due in large part to pressure from managed-care companies that will not pay for therapy or other treatments for children, says an article in *Family Therapy Networker* magazine. This prescribing of drugs as a substitute for therapy, means that children “are being given unproven treatments more haphazardly, and with fewer practical and legal protections, than adults who volunteer to be paid subjects in the clinical trials of new drugs,” the article says. In fact, many of the drugs have not been approved for use in children, and often have severe physical and psychological side effects.

“Some doctors say they are uneasy about prescribing psychoactive drugs to kids,” the article notes, “but they do so because they doubt that the child’s family can get around managed care’s barrier to therapy,” in which a health plan may refuse to pay, or create months of delays. The situation is even worse for children in poor families.

Child psychiatrist Joseph Woolston, the medical director of the children’s psychiatric unit at Yale-New Haven Hospital, says the practice of giving psychoactive medication to children has skyrocketed under managed care. “The pressure to medicate children has increased enormously,” Woolston says. “Every single day we have at least one case where the managed-care reviewer says to us, ‘If you don’t start the child on medications within 24 hours after admission, we will not fund another day of hospital.’”

Woolston says that even more alarming, is the practice of putting “probably tens of thousands of kids” on random combinations of psychoactive medications. “We’re using them as guinea pigs, and not even keeping track of them,” he says.

Therapists in private practice say that managed-care reviewers almost always suggest referring children for medication after

four to six sessions, even when a child’s distress is clearly related to a parental divorce or some other identifiable interpersonal problem. “Managed care sees this as a cheap way to get rid of the problem,” says one child psychologist. “They think of anti-depressants as equivalent to antibiotics.”

Pentagon Scraps ‘Live’ Tests of BMD System

Under the pressure of a summer deadline to evaluate the technological readiness of its ground-based interceptor ballistic missile defense system for President Clinton’s consideration in his decision on whether to deploy, now put off to October from July, the Pentagon is planning to “bend its own rules,” during the scheduled June 26 test of the system, according to the *Washington Post* on May 10.

Speaking on May 9 to a meeting of the Defense Writers Group, Lt. Gen. Ronald Kadish, commander of the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization, reported that engineers have primarily used computer simulations rather than live tests to assess designs for the complex system. The computer simulations are not designed from actual data, but from hypothetical data—going at least one step beyond the notorious practice of benchmarking. General Kadish admitted that moving the program forward with so little information from operational tests is “anomalous,” and bends the usual rules. The Pentagon seems hell-bent on pursuing a program plan that the Defense Department advisory committee last year described as a “rush to failure.”

The testing program has most recently been attacked by the American Physical Society. While no friend to missile defense for the last 25 years, the APS says that the National Missile Defense system must be able to “be effective against the types of offensive countermeasures that an attacker could reasonably be expected to deploy with its long-range missiles.” On the whole, the APS states, “The tests that have been conducted or are planned for the period fall far short of

those required to provide confidence in the technical feasibility called for in last year’s NMD deployment legislation.”

LaRouche Polls 11.2% in Oregon Primary

In Oregon’s unique Presidential primary, conducted entirely by mail over a two-and-a-half-week period, from April 26 to May 16, with only Al Gore and Lyndon LaRouche on the mail-in Democratic Party ballot, LaRouche polled 37,626 votes, for 11.32% of the total, and Gore polled 88.5%, with 294,596 votes, according to Associated Press. There were a considerable number of write-in votes, some 5-10% statewide, but these figures are not yet available. Official results from the Secretary of State will not be available for 30 days.

However, unofficial results provided by Oregon County Election offices, indicate that LaRouche polled over 14% in two Congressional Districts, with 14.2% in the 4th CD and 14.8% in the 2nd CD. Fifteen percent of the vote in a CD is required to qualify for a delegate to the National Convention.

LaRouche’s vote reflected the support of the “forgotten man”—the lower 80% of family-income brackets. In some counties of the 2nd and 4th CDs, LaRouche polled over 20%, and as high as 27-28% in two counties, whereas Gore’s vote in some of these counties was as low as 43-61%. Between LaRouche’s vote and the write-in vote, one-half to two-thirds of the voters in some of these rural counties rejected Gore. The 4th CD includes the Eugene-Springfield area, where there is some new high-tech industry and a college campus, but otherwise the CD is primarily low-income, based on timber and agricultural industry. The 2nd CD has the lowest per-capita income in the state. In this mostly rural district, LaRouche polled 27.6% in Grant County, 24% in Baker County, 20.4% in Harney County, 28.2% in Wheeler County, 23.8% in Union County, and 20.1% in Wallowa County. In the 4th CD, LaRouche polled over 20% in one county, and 10-16% in several others.

Voter turnout was very high, by the standard of other state primaries: 55%. The voters pamphlet, which was sent to every voter in the state, included a picture of LaRouche and a statement from his campaign.

Pennsylvanians Protest Destruction of Schools

Protest is growing against the education policies of Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Ridge (R), the *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported on May 9-10. Ridge has been mooted as a possible vice presidential running mate for George W. Bush. He proposed a bill, which passed the legislature early in May, supposedly aimed at improving the state's lowest performing school districts, but in fact directing a takeover of one school district outright (Chester, which will be placed under a state-appointed board), and significantly broadening the power of the state over the other ten districts, including Philadelphia.

More than 150 protesters from the Chester Upland School District travelled to the state capitol in Harrisburg for a rally to denounce the move.

The powers granted to the state include the ability to privatize some operations; hire uncertified teachers (sure to improve the schools!); dismiss staff without regard to seniority; and create district-operated charter schools. As in other cities where such actions have been taken, the move will weaken the unions, and privatize and even further destroy the public schools.

Many Chester teachers who had planned to attend the rally could not, after their superintendent told them that only 10% could take the day off, and that anyone attending without permission would be fired or face a lengthy suspension. (The district's union contract allows employees to take personal leave with 72 hours notice.)

The law gives nine other districts (including Philadelphia) three years to "solve their problems," or they will also be taken over by the state.

At one of the schools in the Chester Uplands district, slated to be shut down alto-

gether to save \$250,000, there was a protest of parents and teachers, and only 45 of the 384 students attended class.

Democratic Platform 'Hearings' on Internet

The Democratic Party has not yet scheduled any public hearings on what the policy platform for its August Presidential nominating convention should be. A call to the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee elicited the response that no hearings were currently scheduled, nor did anyone know if, or when, they would be held. However, an e-mail from the party indicates that platform hearings would be conducted on the Internet, within the realm of virtual reality—touted as a great opportunity for constituents to submit their ideas for the platform. Constituents would thus be able to have "virtual" input, but no face-to-face debate on the issues.

The Democratic National Committee has teamed up with www.SpeakOut.com to create the first ever Interactive Democratic Platform. This website "makes the Democratic Platform more accessible to the American people," the press release claims. "For the first time ever for a major political party, citizens will be able to submit electronically their own ideas and suggestions for the 2000 Democratic National Platform, which will be adopted at the Democratic National Convention in August 2000."

Internet users will review planks in the 1996 Democratic Platform, and submit their own suggestions for the 2000 Platform. The platform is at www.dncplatform.com.

Just like the first Internet primary in Arizona this year, this Internet platform discussion will reflect the concerns of the upper 20% of income-brackets of Democratic voters, who are more worried about their stock options and the fate of the dot-coms, than the life-and-death concerns of the "forgotten man" in the 80% of the population who still represent the traditional constituencies of the Democratic Party.

NATO'S air war against Kosovo was less successful than claimed, according to a suppressed Air Force report, *Newsweek* revealed. "There were 14 tanks destroyed," said the report, "not 120; 18 APCs destroyed, not 220; and 20 artillery pieces, not 450. And instead of the 744 'confirmed' strikes by NATO pilots, there were only 58 strikes confirmed by U.S. Air Force investigators looking at evidence on the ground."

HEROIN ADDICTION among America's youth is rising dramatically, *USA Today* reported on May 9. Whereas, in 1988, the average age of a first-time heroin user was 27.4 years, today it is 17.6 years. Heroin is now being sold on the streets at such high purity that it is not necessary to use needles; it can be snorted like cocaine.

SOUTH CAROLINA'S House of Representatives voted on May 9 to remove the Confederate flag from the State House dome, and move it to a nearby Confederate war memorial. The 63-56 vote followed months of controversy and an economic boycott by the NAACP. The 26-member Black Caucus had demanded that the flag be "removed—not moved."

TWO HUNDRED Washington, D.C. firefighters on May 8 demonstrated in protest against the decision by the Financial Control Board, which oversees the city's finances, to veto a \$4 million city budget request that would have added a fifth firefighter to ladder trucks, which firefighters believe would have prevented the death of three firefighters in the past two years.

THE ANTI-DEFAMATION League of B'nai B'rith was ordered to pay \$10.5 million in damages in a Colorado lawsuit. This first-ever defamation ruling against the ADL stemmed from a neighborhood spat, in which the ADL instructed Mitchell and Candace Aronson to illegally monitor the telephone conversations of their neighbors, William and Dorothy Quigley.