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Antipsychotic Drugs: Oversold and Under-Warned

Antipsychotic drugs have now become the top-selling class of prescription drugs in the United States, with \$14.6 billion in annual revenue. Quite a trick for a group of drugs approved for one percent or less of the population.

But now you can go into any nursing home or elementary school and find non-psychotic patients taking these anti-psychotic drugs every day. Therein lies a marketing story for pharmaceutical manufacturers, who have danced around FDA regulations intended to keep the drugs marketed for only proven and safe uses.

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The names include Abilify, Geodon, Seroquel, Zyprexa -- and the side effects include weight gain, drowsiness, nausea, involuntary body movements, and even diabetes.

The New York Times' Duff Wilson has a [long takeout](#) on this marketing story and the many lawsuits that have turned up industry documents showing how regulations are ignored and skirted.

Two quotes from this must-read story hit my eye:

“If you have a lot of money on the table and you have clinical uncertainty over mental health conditions, where you don’t have a blood test or objective test for it, you see it’s kind of a combustible mixture,” says Dr. Mark Olfson, a Columbia University psychiatry professor and researcher.

And this one:

“It’s the money,” says Dr. Jerome L. Avorn, a Harvard medical professor and researcher. “When you’re selling \$1 billion a year or more of a drug, it’s very tempting for a company to just ignore the traffic ticket and keep speeding.”

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