Developing Concerns:
Exploring ADHD Medication Alternatives

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Pediatricians often find that many parents of children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are reluctant to treat their children with stimulant medication, despite their well researched efficacy. In addition, difficulties with ADHD medication shortages and recent reports of possible long term medication effects have led pediatricians to reconsider non-stimulant medications as an alternative. However, atomoxetine is often not sufficiently effective in controlling ADHD symptoms. A new study just published is worth considering for your ADHD patients, comparing atomoxetine (Strattera) to viloxazine ER (Qelbree). Both medication are considered selective norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors, and viloxazine has recently been reformulated as a extended release medication approved by the FDA for ADHD.

In this non-randomized, non-controlled open-label comparison study, 35 children (mean age 11.9 years) and 15 adults (mean age 29.3 years) with combined type ADHD were treated first with atomoxetine once daily followed by viloxazine ER once daily with a 5 day washout period between the two drugs. 43 % of the children and 73% of the adults were taking concurrent stimulants. Participants were seen weekly for titration and monitoring. ADHD rating scales were completed at baseline and after 4 weeks of medication treatment with each drug.

What did they find?

Improvements in ADHD rating scales at 4 weeks were greater with viloxazine than with atomoxetine in both children and adults, for both inattention and hyperactivity/impulsivity. Side effects were lower with viloxazine (4% with fatigue) and 36% discontinued atomoxetine due to side effects (mostly GI upset, fatigue and insomnia). Surprisingly, 96% of participants preferred viloxazine over atomoxetine, and 85% were able to taper off stimulant treatment following stabilization on viloxazine.

This study is particularly helpful, since many patients will have insurers that mandate a trial of generic atomoxetine prior to covering branded viloxazine.

(Price, M.Z., Price, R.L. Extended-Release Viloxazine Compared with Atomoxetine for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. *CNS Drugs* **37**, 655–660 (2023). https://doi.org/10.1007/s40263-023-01023-6)



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