

Methylphenidate and Animal Testing

“She’s great in class! She never causes any trouble!” By the time I was in second grade, my parents were sick of hearing these words. Countless parent-teacher meetings, and they still could not understand what was wrong with my academic performance: I scored well on quizzes and tests, but failed to complete homework assignments and projects. They knew I was smart enough to succeed, my high GATE scores provided ample proof, yet I continued to perform poorly in class. It wasn’t until years later, when I reached the eighth grade, that we discovered the cause: Attention Deficit Disorder.

Needless to say, it came as a bit of a shock. After all, ADHD kids are supposed to act out, right? That was not the case with me; after all, I never caused any trouble in class. I received good grades, despite the fact that I had never once studied, instead, I relied solely on what I remembered from class. This strategy worked well for years, but in the eighth grade, I became overwhelmed. The workload became too much, and, as I had never felt the need to study before, I had no idea how to begin.

Eventually, my mother decided that enough was enough. She had read an article describing the manifestation of ADD symptoms in girls. I fit every criterion on the article’s list. We went in for an evaluation, and later that day, I was diagnosed with ADD. My doctor and I discussed treatment options with my parents.

Talk therapy and working on my study skills were an obvious must. My doctor also recommended medication, but my parents, my mother in particular, disagreed with the suggestion, fearing for my long-term health. However, my doctor convinced her. I began taking Concerta, or methylphenidate, a type of stimulant that works by allowing my body to release extra dopamine, making it easier for me to focus and pay attention. It worked like a charm, better than we ever could have hoped.

I had never experienced being able to think “normally”. More accurately, I had never known how large of a burden my ADD was. Imagine this: the brain is made of wires, each wire representing a train of thought. The wires of neurotypical people are organized and laid out neatly; when the person needs to think about something, they simply pick up a wire and plug it

in. In an ADHD brain, the wires are tangled. One cannot plug in one wire without taking many others with it. Because of this, those with ADHD do not have control over what they think about. The medication essentially organized the wires for me. It had nothing to do with how smart I was, or how I was thinking about things.

The medications were not a magic solution, though. There was much work to be done on my part, and I am still working. In terms of time management and study skills, I fall far behind my peers. I am working hard to catch up in terms of those skills, on top of my school work and my extracurricular activities.

As I later found out, this medication, would not exist without animal testing, such as studies on Wistar rats, commonly used to simulate ADHD, which proved that methylphenidate decreased impulsive behavior in juvenile rats. Animal testing is no doubt a controversial subject, however one cannot claim that the practice is not necessary. Many of today's medical breakthroughs would not be possible if not for animal testing. I am grateful, because of this animal testing, I am on the path to success, a path that might not have been accessible to me without treatment, regardless of my motivation levels.

It's not that the medication put me on the path, or gives me an edge above everyone else. Rather, it allowed me the same chance of success as others. Think of life as an obstacle course, where the first obstacle is a locked door. Almost everyone is born with a key to that door. Me and people like me were born without that key. Rather than open the door and move on to tackle the rest of the obstacles on our own, we are stuck. The medication acted as my key. Along with hard work, it opened that door for me. Now, I am free to run the obstacle course with the same odds as everyone else. I owe that to animal testing, as treatment would most likely not be available to me without animal testing.