Are Antidepressants over-prescribed?  MHRN Data Address Controversy.

Recent reports raised concerns about an increasing prescription of antidepressant drugs to patients with no recorded mental health diagnosis. Nearly 10% of US adults now fill 1 or more antidepressant prescription annually. Most of these are written by non-psychiatrists. However, data used for these recent reports may not provide the whole picture.

Using combined pharmacy dispensing and claims data, MHRN researchers examined diagnoses received by health plan members filling prescriptions for antidepressant drugs in more detail. Out of a population of over 10 million health plan members, we identified over one million health plan members filling 1 or more antidepressant prescriptions in 2010.

Key findings:

- Across the ten MHRN sites participating in this study, the proportion with no mental health diagnosis was substantially less than recently reported elsewhere
- The proportion using antidepressants who received no mental health diagnoses was larger for those using trazodone, tricyclic antidepressants, or cupropion than for those using other antidepressants.

Concerns regarding the quality of antidepressant treatment persist, but findings in this relatively large sample seem to suggest that antidepressant prescribing for inappropriate indications is less of a concern than previous studies may have suggested.

MHRN Infrastructure and access to the data resources within the MHRN network allowed researchers the ability to examine this relevant question within a very short timeline, and required minimal additional resources.

These findings will be published soon in the Journal of Clinical Psychiatry. If you have questions about these research findings, please contact Greg Simon.