

Time to address stimulant abuse on our campuses

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Universities and colleges need to do more to protect young adults from the dangers of illicit stimulant use and to educate them about harms, argue the authors of an editorial in *CMAJ (Canadian Medical Association Journal)*.

Students use [stimulants](#) to keep them alert to enhance their academic performance, although the perceived benefits are questionable.

"The vast majority of the evidence shows no cognitive improvements with the use of stimulants when compared with placebo in healthy individuals. In short, students who think simply popping a pill will improve their grades or give them new-found academic abilities are sorely mistaken," write Dr. Daniel Rosenfield, CMAJ Editor-in-Chief Dr. Paul Hebert and coauthors.

"Abuse of [prescription medications](#) such as [methylphenidate](#) and atomoxetine has been estimated at an alarming rate ranging from 5% to 35%. Without action, some of our best and brightest minds are at risk," they state.

Many students are unaware of the potential side effects and harms associated with stimulants. When stimulants are used without [medical supervision](#), used for the wrong purpose or taken inappropriately (i.e., snorting or injecting), harmful effects — such as irregular heart beat, overdose, depression, addiction and even death — are likely.

As universities and colleges are common venues for abuse of stimulants, given the perception that they boost grades, students need to recognize the seriousness of the issues. Universities need to engage students in focused health education campaigns that debunk myths and expose risks, and identify and address the root cause of stimulant use.

The authors conclude: "Like doping in sports, abuse of stimulants by our best and brightest students should be denormalized by being viewed as cheating or substance abuse, pure and simple."

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